HOME-BASED LEARNING SUPPORT GROUPS
IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA:
AN INTERPRETIVIST STUDY

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This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education of The University of Western Australia

Graduate School of Education

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that no part of it has been submitted for a degree at any university. Also, I declare that to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published by another person, except where due reference is made to it in the text. Ethical approval for this research project has been received from the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Western Australia on 26 September 2013.

Susanna Magdalena Conradie

June 2016
Home-based learning (HBL) is a growing, legal educational alternative in many countries, including Australia. Various organisations formed to support this practice of parents or guardians taking responsibility for the education of their compulsory school-age children outside the conventional school system. A review of international and Australian literature pertaining to HBL concluded that HBL support organisations have been the focus of only a few studies internationally, and none in Australia. This study was a response to attempt to rectify the deficit.

This study set out to develop understandings on HBL support organisations in Western Australia (WA). The research had three aims. The first aim was to develop an understanding of the historical background of HBL support groups in WA, and in particular of Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) of WA, the only State-wide HBL support organisation. The second aim was to develop an understanding of the functions of HBLN in meeting the diverse needs of the HBL community in the State. The third aim was to develop an understanding of the issues of concern for the leaders of HBL support groups in WA in carrying out their functions. The decision to undertake this research was influenced by the belief that the understandings that would be developed would help to inform decisions to improve HBL support practices.

Qualitative methods of data gathering as proposed by ‘grounded theorists’ were employed. These research methods are consistent with the symbolic interactionist view of human action, offering a comprehensive and systematic framework for inductively generating theory. Data gathering took place through document study and semi-structured interviews with the leaders of HBL support organisations in WA. Grounded theory methods of data analysis were used to generate the understandings.
Understandings regarding the historical background and functions of the HBLN of WA were developed and provided a framework within which issues of concern for HBL support-group leaders could be contextualised. The historical background to HBLN was described from its formation to the time the study was conducted in 2014. The functions of HBLN were categorised and analysed according to official functions, non-official functions, unintended functions, undesired functions, and aspirational functions.

The major issues of concern for HBL support-organisation leaders in WA in supporting the HBL community in the State were categorised in terms of four areas of concern, namely, ‘the various characteristics of the HBL community’, ‘various State authorities’, ‘the practice of HBL’ and ‘HBLN as an organisation’. In each of these areas of concern, were a number of themes. The issues of concern for HBL support-group leaders were further analysed to develop understandings in relation to inconveniences, impediments and impending threats to the support of the HBL community in WA.

These understandings provide a new perspective on issues facing HBL support groups in supporting the HBL community in WA. A number of implications for practice, administration, leadership and policy are drawn from them. Several recommendations for further research are also made.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>Australian Christian College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACE</td>
<td>Accelerated Christian Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACHS</td>
<td>Australian Christian Home Schooling</td>
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<tr>
<td>AERG</td>
<td>Alternative Education Research Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCHE</td>
<td>Canadian Centre for Home Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEM</td>
<td>Christian Education Ministries</td>
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<tr>
<td>HBL</td>
<td>Home-based learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>HBLN</td>
<td>Home-based Learning Network of WA</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEA</td>
<td>Home Education Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEN</td>
<td>Home Education Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSLDA</td>
<td>Home School Legal Defense Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICHER</td>
<td>International Center of Home Education Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOTE</td>
<td>Language Other Than English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHERI</td>
<td>National Home Education Research Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHEN</td>
<td>Perth Home Education Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIDE</td>
<td>School of Isolated and Distance Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOSE</td>
<td>Studies of Society and Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWA</td>
<td>University of Western Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Home-based learning (HBL) is a growing, legal educational alternative in many countries, including Australia. Different organisations developed to support this practice of parents or guardians taking responsibility for the education of their compulsory school age children outside the conventional school system. These organisations include support groups and social networks with a wide range of functions.

A limited, but growing, corpus of research on HBL is emerging mainly from the United States of America (USA), Canada and the United Kingdom (UK). A small number of Australian studies have also examined HBL. However, HBL support organisations have been the focus of very few studies internationally, and no studies have been conducted on them in Australia.

The study reported in this thesis is one response to attempt to rectify the deficit. The aim of the study was to investigate the background to, and the functions and concerns of, HBL organisations in Western Australia (WA). It adopted a broad interpretive approach as it aimed to reveal issues rather than build on existing ideas. Also, it was driven by the desire that it should have practical relevance. Such an orientation was influenced by the personal experience of the researcher who has been a home educator for eleven years and who, from her experience and commitment, was led to engaging in research aimed to improve practice.

The study had three main aims. The first aim was to develop an understanding of the history of the background of HBL support organisations in WA. This was deemed
important as the past can have an impact on the present and, consequently, needs to be considered when dealing with contemporary issues. Furthermore, it was held that knowing the history of HBL support organisations would go a long way towards explaining the present perspectives of many HBL parents and support-organisation leaders. Secondly, the research sought to develop an understanding of the functions of HBL support organisations in WA, with specific reference to the largest, State-wide organisation, the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN). The particular focus was on leaders of HBL support organisations in WA who provide support to a diverse HBL community. The third aim of the research was to develop an understanding of the concerns that present themselves for the leaders of HBL support organisations in WA.

The remainder of this introductory chapter presents an overview of the thesis. First, the phenomenon of HBL is described to provide a general understanding of this educational practice. Specific reference is made to HBL support organisations in WA. Secondly, this is followed by an overview of the literature pertaining to the HBL and HBL support organisations. This overview highlights the paucity of research in the field and justifies the need for a study of this kind. Thirdly, an outline of the research plan and methodology is presented. Finally, an overview of the structure of the thesis is provided. All of these areas are dealt with at a general level in this chapter and they are discussed in greater depth in later chapters.

### 1.2 DEFINITIONS AND BROAD RESEARCH CONTEXT

#### 1.2.1 What is Home-Based Learning (HBL)?

Home-based learning is the practice of parents or guardians taking responsibility for the education of their compulsory school-age children outside of the conventional school system. HBL includes “homeschooling” where parents are primarily responsible for their child’s education and distance education where the children are enrolled in an
accredited school for distance education (Harding, 2011). Usage in this thesis varies according to context and source being cited.

Different authors use different terms to describe this practice. In Australia, the term ‘home-based learning’ appears to be gaining acceptance and preference in the home-education field. The term is inclusive of all learning, educating and schooling activities taking place outside of the institutional, public and private, school system. Hence, the term ‘home-based learning’ is used in this study.

1.2.2 Partners in Home-Based Learning

The success of each HBL family depends on the characteristics and mutual cooperation of the four major partners involved, namely children, parents, government and the wider community (Angelis, 2008; Neuman & Aviram, 2003). The foremost partner in HBL is compulsory school-age children who learn at home. As the “active facilitators of the family’s educational endeavour” (Harding, 2011, p. 257), parents are at the centre of their children’s education, and not, as is often the case with parents of traditional schooling children, at the periphery.

In the majority of affluent countries, education is considered the responsibility of the government. Therefore the government can also be considered an HBL partner. However, a debate exists as to where the responsibility to educate children actually lies. This results in debates about parents’ rights versus governments’ responsibility (Harding, 2011). Although most HBL practitioners consider education to be the parents’ responsibility, the government still has an influence on them through controlling registration requirements and through monitoring.

The different partners’ perceptions of their roles within HBL can influence the approach that a specific family will follow and thus also affect the support needs of an HBL
family (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Also, HBL families can differ in the way they approach the task of learning at home (Van Schalkwyk, 2010; Webb, 2010). The level of structure adopted can range from highly structured, curriculum-driven ‘school-at-home’ practices, including some forms of distance education (Green, 2006) and accelerated learning (VanTassel-Baska & Little, 2011), to unstructured, child-led, delight-driven learning as practiced by unschoolers (Holt, 1981; Paine, 2012a; Webb, 1999). Between these two approaches a range of structures can be found: virtual homeschooling (Black, 2009; Jones, 2007), Classical Education (Bauer & Wise, 2004), Charlotte Mason homeschooling, flexi-schooling (Webb, 2010), Waldorf homeschooling, and Montessori methods. Long-time home-based learners often use an eclectic approach that incorporates different methods and resources to optimise learning within their circumstances (Barratt-Peacock, 1997). Although HBL families may share certain support needs, practitioners of different approaches can also experience approach-specific needs.

1.2.3 Support Organisations for Home-Based Learning

As the phenomenon of HBL grew internationally, nationally and in WA, it developed its own infrastructure in the form of support groups, official networks, and conferences. Although the existence of groups and individuals providing support within the HBL community is a reality, and fleeting references are made to them in academic literature (Barfield, 2002; Reilly, 2007), little substantive exploration or explanation of the support dimension of the HBL phenomenon has been undertaken.

Support provision in HBL is diverse in practice and motivation, and takes place on different levels. The geographical reach of the different support providers ranges from local to international. HBL support providers can also be grouped according to the level
of personal involvement that their members experience. Extensive HBL support is provided online and is accessible worldwide.

Although the accessibility of HBL support and resources on the internet lessen the need for ‘person-to-person’ support, ‘real person support’ is deemed to be still valuable and is available in the form of national or State-specific organisations with a web presence, as well as from local support groups. Some of these groups subscribe to, or promote, a specific educational philosophy or curriculum, while others are open to home-based learners of all philosophies. Examples of this level of support organisations in Australia are Home Education Network (HEN), Home Education Association (HEA) and Christian Education Ministries (CEM) (Christian Education Ministries, 2012; Home Education Network, 2011; Wright, 2011).

At the micro level local HBL support groups, networks, social groups and co-operatives exist to fulfil specific functions to serve HBL families living in the same town, or suburb. Local homeschool support groups are groups of homeschooling parents that meet in real-life to socialise and share information and advice. A homeschool cooperative (co-op) is a formal variant of local support groups. It consists of a group of homeschooling parents who gather to collectively teach their children on one or more days a week (Vaughan, 2003). This provides the opportunity for children to learn from other parents who are specialised in a certain area or subject (Muldowney, 2011).

Support organisations for the HBL community in WA include the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) of WA, a few independent groups supporting specific groups within the HBL community, colleges of distance education based in WA, and online communities. HBLN is the only State-wide home-education support organisation in WA and is run by a committee of active home-educating parents volunteering their time and expertise. Some co-ops, like Natural Learning Hub and The Hive, and support
organisations for specific religious groups, like *Catholic Homeschoolers Support Group* and *HomeschoolWA*, operate independent of HBLN.

There are three distance education organisations based in WA that provide government-approved curricula for HBL students in the State, namely Southlands, Swanonline and the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). There are also two online communities for homeschoolers in Perth, namely *Perth Home Education Network* (PHEN) and *Perth Homeschoolers*. Literature on these organisations is limited to publications by the organisations themselves, and the information on their respective websites.

### 1.3 OVERVIEW OF THE RELEVANT ACADEMIC LITERATURE

There is a paucity of articles on HBL in international academic journals. An examination of the empirical literature on homeschooling revealed that the majority of the studies were undertaken in North America and Britain (Nicholls, 1997). A few research organisations, like the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) in the USA and the Canadian Centre for Home Education (2012), specialise in homeschool research. Research focuses around the reasons why parents choose to home educate their children, the academic achievement of home-educated children, the socialisation, self-concept or self-esteem of home-schooled children, as well as the academic or employment outcome when the children are beyond school age.

Despite the long history of HBL in Australia, there is only a small, albeit growing body of Australian-focused research in the field. A study on home education was undertaken by Krivanek in 1985 which included a survey of members of the *Alternative Education Research Group* (AERG) in Melbourne (Krivanek, 1985). For the next few years, research projects were mainly conducted within the then largest home-education group
in Australia (Harding, 2008), namely the group that used the CEM curriculum. Researchers active in this area included Mullaly (1993) and Harding (1997, 2006). Hunter (1994) ventured to describe the broader home-education practice in Australia at the same time.

A few Australian doctoral studies have been completed in the HBL field. Barratt-Peacock (1997) interviewed and observed home-educating families from across Australia, and described the Australian home-educating family as a community of learning practice. Reilly (2007) investigated how parents deal with home schooling their children with intellectual disabilities, while Jackson (2009) studied the transitions of home-educated students between home and school. Harding (2011) studied parents’ conceptions of their roles as home educators of their children.

Chapman and O’Donoghue (2000) identified four key areas for research into HBL in Australia, namely reasons for home schooling, the academic achievements and social development of home-educated students, the characteristics of homeschooling families and categories of parents, and how parents manage the home-education process. The first area was explored by a number of Australian authors (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, 2003; Harding, 1997, 2008), who found that parents choose to home educate their children to convey their beliefs and values to their children, to sustain or create close family relationships, to ensure their children’s academic success, and to ensure positive social interaction for their children by, for example avoiding negative peer influences. Some children learn at home because of practical reasons as geographical isolation, or to support their unique educational and health situations. The second area, the academic achievements and social development of home-educated students, was investigated by Jackson (2007), Barratt-Peacock (1997) and Brosnan (1991), who found that home education had a positive effect on students’ personal growth and self-concept. Harding
(2006) contributed to research on this by studying the post home-education study pathways of 438 home-educated students.

A few studies were completed addressing the last two key areas. Harding (2008) determined that the HBL approaches adopted in Australia can be classified as eclectic, unschooling, or ‘school-at-home’. He (Harding, 2011) also contributed to the understanding of homeschooling families and how parents manage the home-education process and found that being an advocate for home education or supporting other home educators were important to them. That may explain why many HBL parents are involved as volunteers in organising support groups or services for other home educators.

Globally, only four empirical studies that focused on support organisations for HBL have been located. Two studies focused on homeschool co-ops in the USA (Muldowney, 2011; Vaughan, 2003). The third study considered the role of school boards in supporting Canadian parents in home educating their children (Clendening, 1996). The fourth study dates from the late 1980s when the modern homeschooling movement started to gain legal acceptance in the USA (Bishop, 1991). This was a study of the concerns and functions of homeschool parent support groups in Kansas.

It can be seen from this broad overview of the literature that much more research is needed to understand the HBL phenomenon and especially the organisations supporting HBL. Although frequent reference is made to the value of HBL support organisations in professional literature, few studies have focused on them. Jackson (2011) listed ten Australian studies under research on ‘Home Education Networks’, and referred to how “many home educators value their home-education networks as they catered for social and educational needs of both students and parents” (n.p.), but on closer investigation,
all these studies (including Reilly’s 2007 Ph.D. and Simich’s 1998 M.Ed.) focused on other aspects of HBL, for example, on how parents manage the HBL process.

No research has investigated the historical background to HBL support organisations in Australia, and more specifically in WA. Furthermore, there has been no research on the functions of these organisations, the concerns of their leaders and the strategies they use to deal with those concerns within the WA contexts. These later observations led to the development of the research plan that is now outlined below.

1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH PLAN AND METHODOLOGY

The research plan and methodology are elaborated in detail in Chapter Four, but key elements are briefly overviewed in this section.

1.4.1 The Central Research Questions

The following three interrelated central research questions were based on the three aims of the study reported later in this thesis and guided the choice of research methodology:

1. What is the historical background to the HBL support groups, and specifically the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) in WA?

2. What are the functions of the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) in WA?

3. What are the issues of concern for HBL support groups in WA, with particular reference to the largest of these groups, namely, the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN)?

1.4.2 Theoretical Framework

The study reported in this thesis was an enquiry into the historical background of HBL support organisations in WA, their functions, and issues of concern for these organisations. The Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) was the only State-wide
HBL support group in WA at the time the study reported in this thesis took place, and was therefore the focus of the study.

This inquiry required a method of investigation that allows for the interpretation of social phenomena by revealing the different meanings constructed by people in a social context (Gubrium & Holstein, 2005). Thus, an interpretive approach located within the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism was adopted. This theoretical perspective emphasises social interaction as the basis for knowledge and is consistent with the interpretivist view that interaction between human beings is essential to understand meaning. The approach had been chosen for this study because it allows the researcher to unveil people’s perspectives on a phenomenon (O’Donoghue, 2007).

Perspectives, the central concept within the interpretivist paradigm, are the frameworks or concept maps through which people make sense of the world (Woods, 1992) and can only be accessed by talking to people. To adopt this position primary importance should be placed on the social meanings people attach to the world around them and how they respond to them (Steven & Taylor, 1998). To put it another way, the interdependency between the individual and society should be recognised. This was put succinctly by Blumer (1969), who is attributed as being the first person to codify the position, when he stated that “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them”, that “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interactions that one has with one’s fellows” and that “these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process by the person dealing with the things he encounters” (1969, p. 2). The same position has been articulated more recently by Charmaz (2006) and Creswell (2013). Also, the communication process using common language is the mechanism by which meanings are shared (Crotty, 1998).
Constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1992) is consistent with this view of the interpretivist paradigm. Accordingly, it was used for generating theory which is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed from the empirical world (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 2008). The essence of grounded theory is to describe and understand human behaviour within its social context, rather than to evaluate and measure for accuracy (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986). Grounded theory methodology follows an inductive approach to data gathering and data analysis, which enables final propositions to be generated from the data collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

1.4.3 Study Population and Participant Selection

The study population regarding the first research question included past and present HBL support groups in WA, but mostly HBLN, the only State-wide HBL support group in WA at the time the study reported in this thesis took place. While this research question was primarily addressed through document analysis, subsequent interviews with HBL support-group leaders were also drawn upon.

The study population regarding the second research question was HBLN, the only State-wide HBL support group in WA at the time the study reported in this thesis took place. The reason for focusing on HBLN was logistics; the project would have been too big if all smaller and local groups were to be studied in depth. This research question was investigated largely through document analysis, supplemented by a series of semi-structured individual interviews with HBL support-group leaders.

The study population regarding the third research question was all HBL support groups in general, but with particular reference to the main group, namely, HBLN. In investigating this research question, the researcher focused on the leaders of HBL support groups because of the potential of these individuals to provide rich description
of the issues of concern within the HBL environment in WA. This research question was investigated through semi-structured individual interviews with the leaders of HBLN.

Participants were chosen through theoretical sampling strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) based on the notions of purposeful sampling and maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The first interview was with the president of HBLN. This interview was transcribed and analysed before the second interview took place. The subsequent individual interviews were with other HBL support-group leaders who were purposefully selected for maximum variation. Criteria for ‘divergence’ were developed, and leaders who met the criteria were systematically interviewed.

### 1.4.4 Data Gathering, Analysis, Recording and Storage

Grounded theory methods of data gathering and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) were used in the study. Data gathering took place through semi-structured interviews and document study.

The grounded theory methods of open-coding and analytical induction were used to analyse the data (Steven & Taylor, 1998). Throughout the research process, data gathering and data analysis took place concurrently (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), with each informing and focusing the other (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). These research methods are consistent with the interpretivist view of human action (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986), offering a comprehensive and systematic framework for inductively building theory.

The generated understandings were grounded in the systematically gathered and analysed data from the empirical world (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Glaser & Strauss,
1965; Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 2008). The outcome of the study was the development and verification of substantive theory (Glaser, 1978; Woods, 1992).

Since the reported study aimed to develop understandings, the labelling of concepts and the creation of categories involved a complex process which requires an orderly and efficient system of data coding, storage and retrieval (Corbin, 1986). The interviews were recorded and the recordings were transcribed, coded and filed in a locked cabinet. Data from documentary sources were also coded and filed. The sound records, transcripts, research notes and analysed data will be stored under lock for the period prescribed by the UWA Ethics Committee.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This chapter provided a brief overview of the study reported in this thesis. Nine more chapters follow. Chapter Two contains an overview of the contextual background of HBL, and in particular HBL support organisations, within the international, national and WA settings. Chapter Three presents a brief review of the main bodies of international and national literature pertaining to the study, and concludes by discussing the study’s substantial and original contribution to knowledge. Chapter Four outlines the qualitative methods of research that facilitated an investigation of the three research questions.

Chapters Five to Nine report the study and present an exposition of the understandings developed. Chapter Five presents the background to the development of HBLN as the only State-wide HBL support organisations in WA, as well as its functions. Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine provide an understanding of the areas of concerns that present themselves for leaders of HBL support groups in supporting the HBL community in WA. Chapter Ten concludes the thesis. It consists of an overview of the
study, a higher order analysis of the findings presented in Chapters Six to Nine, and implications of the research findings for practice and further research.
CHAPTER 2
CONTEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Home-based learning (HBL) is an alternative form of education practised in various settings. This chapter provides a description of the context in which the HBL phenomenon manifests itself internationally, in Australia, and specifically in WA. The first section of the chapter explains what HBL involves and briefly highlights the polemic surrounding terminology in the field. The next section explains how the practice of HBL developed and is realised internationally, in Australia and in Western Australia (WA). The general types of HBL support available and the organisations providing the support are then detailed. Following this, the HBL support organisations functioning within WA are outlined.

2.2 HOME-BASED LEARNING (HBL)

Home-based learning is the practice of parents or guardians taking responsibility for the education of their compulsory school-age children outside of the conventional school system. This fast-growing alternative form of education (Leiding, 2008) comprises a spectrum of educational activities. It includes the practices of homeschooling and distance education.

Homeschooling has been defined as “parent-led home-based education” (Ray, 2011b n.p.) or HBL. It includes what Harding (2011) described as “home education” where parents educate their children in a family setting in and around their home, either being primarily responsible for their child’s education (homeschooling) or having the children “enrolled in an accredited school for distance education” (2011, p. 3).
2.2.1 Terminology

Different authors use different terms to describe HBL. These include ‘home schooling’, ‘homeschooling’, ‘home education’, ‘unschooling’, ‘deschooling’ and ‘distance education’. Although all of these terms describe the practice of children learning at home, they cannot always be used interchangeably. The practitioners of this form of education value, and want to accentuate, a specific aspect of their activity through the term used to describe it.

For a long time, the term ‘home education’ seemed to be the best one to describe the activity of ‘education taking place at home’. However, the term ‘unschooling’ was coined in the 1960s by the educator, John Holt, widely regarded as the ‘father’ of unschooling (Rivero, 2008). ‘Unschooling’ accentuates the fact that this activity does not involve ‘schooling’. He kept using the term until the 1980s, when he started using the term ‘homeschooling’. The rationale behind choosing ‘homeschooling’ recognised that the terms ‘home’ and ‘schooling’ both had an accepted meaning and affective value within the community. When parents would say that they ‘homeschooled’ their child, the ideas of schooling and learning within the home would jump to mind (Meighan, 2007). Nevertheless, ‘homeschooling’ is still today the most-used term in the USA.

While for many years, the term ‘homeschooling’ was the accepted term used worldwide, and many authors used it (Chapman & O’Donoghue, 2000), some practitioners in this educational movement raised serious objections against the term. They usually consist of groups of home educators who would never want to be referred to as practicing ‘schooling’. They want to get away from the concept of ‘schooling’ and prefer the use of the terms ‘home education’. Furthermore, there are practitioners who have objections about the use of ‘home’ in ‘homeschooling’ or ‘home education’. They consider the reference to ‘home’ as restrictive and explain that their education activities,
although based at home, often take place in the community, including in local libraries and museums. These practitioners speak of ‘home-based education’ or ‘community education’. Another group points out that their children learn naturally at home, without the intervention of adults. For them, this means that children learn without being taught or educated. Such practitioners (Paine, 2012a) disapprove of the terms ‘schooling’ and ‘education’. They prefer to describe their activity as ‘learning’ and often speak of either ‘home-based learning’ or ‘natural learning’.

At the other end of the spectrum, home education can take the form of formal distance education where students are enrolled at registered distance education schools and conduct their academic work at home under the supervision of a parent. These practitioners use the term ‘distance education’. In WA, the terminology is further complicated because, when distance educators use government approved curricula, the WA Department of Education does not require them to register as home educators. Hence these distance educators are not considered as home educators by the State government.

Different terms are favoured in different countries. As mentioned above, in the USA the term ‘homeschooling’ is still the preferred term. In the UK, however, ‘elective home education’ is used (Webb, 2010). This term is seen as being inclusive of all home-education activities. In Australia, terminology in the HBL field is evolving. Also, there are subtle differences in motivation and practice among Australian home educators and those in the USA and UK. In Australia, the term ‘home-based learning’ is perceived to be gaining acceptance and preference in the home-education field. This term is inclusive of all learning, educating and schooling activities taking place outside of the institutional, public and private school system. It embraces the spectrum from ‘radical unschoolers’ to ‘distance education’.
For the purpose of the study reported later in this thesis, ‘HBL’ was used to refer to the activity of parents or guardians taking responsibility for the education of their children of compulsory school-age outside of the conventional school system. However, cognizance was taken of the fact that, depending on the context of practice, location, and place in time, different terms are used to describe the phenomenon. Therefore, when referring to the works of other authors, the context under discussion was considered and the terminology used by the author of the work, was used. The terms ‘homeschooler’ and ‘homeschooling’ were also frequently used in this thesis because members of the HBL community in WA, including the participants of the study reported here, seem to use these terms when referring to themselves.

Given how nuances in motivation and practice can influence how HBL is referred to, further problems with terminology arise. The question can be asked: What is the appropriate term to use when referring to the two main role players in HBL? Terms used include ‘parents’ and ‘children’ (e.g. Harding, 2011), ‘students’ and ‘supervisors’ (e.g. Australian Christian College Southlands, 2012), ‘home educators’ and ‘home-based learners’ (e.g. Wright, 2011), and ‘mother teacher’ and ‘home-school learners’ (e.g. Van Schalkwyk & Bouwer, 2011). Again, the terminology used by authors and participants is indicative of their perspective on HBL.

Two other terms used within the HBL community that need clarification are ‘unschooling’ and ‘deschooling’. ‘Unschooling’ is an educational method and philosophy that rejects that a person has to be taught to learn and thus rejects compulsory school as a primary means for learning (Paine, 2013b; Rivero, 2008). Unschoolers learn through their natural life experiences. Unschooling encourages exploration of activities initiated by the children themselves. The underlying belief is that the more personal learning is, the more meaningful, well-understood and therefore
useful it is to the child. ‘Unschooling’ is thus a philosophically separate subgroup of homeschooling and HBL (Monteiro & Scaglia, 2010).

Within the Australian context, the term ‘unschooling’ refers to a spectrum of home-educating practices (Paine, 2012b). ‘Radical unschoolers’ accept that children are capable and responsible thinkers and that adults should not stand in their way when learning. This is referred to as ‘delight-directed’ or ‘child-directed’ learning. Another group of unschoolers accepts that children are capable and responsible thinkers who learn from birth, and they see the adult’s role as helping to meet their needs by creating within homes and the community the environment in which the child’s unique personality and talents can be developed.

There is also a group of unschoolers whose aim is to create a relaxed environment without the need to satisfy outside desires and goals. They operate without outside ‘management agendas’. They experiment with a range of different approaches before choosing those that they consider best satisfying their child’s learning needs and reflect their family values. What all these variations of unschooling have in common is that educating their children from home gives them the time to explore and enhance the multitude of natural ways they all learn every moment of every day (Paine, 2012b).

The term ‘deschooling’ is used by both education philosophers and proponents of alternative education, but it refers to different things in different contexts. The term was popularized by Ivan Illich in his 1971 book Deschooling Society (Illich, 1971). Within the HBL context, ‘deschooling’ is the initial stage of homeschooling or unschooling where the parents and children shun ‘schoolish’ thoughts about learning (Laricchia, 2016). ‘Deschooling’ can also be used to describe the period of time between leaving school and finding one’s innate learning style and preferences, and working out the best way to move forward when educating outside of the school environment. It involves the
shedding of assumptions about education and how it is delivered to both children and adults (Paine, 2013b). If school has provided a negative experience for the child, ‘deschooling’ is seen as the period that the child needs to recover, discover his or her interests, and rediscover the joy of learning. After a period of ‘deschooling’ a family may gradually move into ‘unschooling’.

2.2.2 Partners in HBL

The choice to become an HBL family and to function as an “intentional community of learning practice”, is a lifestyle choice that can cause “a metamorphosis of the family” (Harding, 2011, p. 256). After considering the works of different authors and advocates in the HBL area (Angelis, 2008; Neuman & Aviram, 2003), the conclusion was reached by this researcher that there are four partners involved in HBL, namely children, parents, government and the wider community, and that the extent to which these communities of potential learning practice are successful in their HBL activities, depends on the characteristics and mutual cooperation of these partners.

2.2.2.1 Children

By its very nature, HBL cannot happen without children. Therefore, the foremost partner in HBL is the child of compulsory school age who learns at home. HBL provides individualised learning experiences for children to optimally develop as persons (Ray, 2011b).

2.2.2.2 Parents

Parents are the “active facilitators of the family's educational endeavour” (Harding, 2011, p. 257). HBL parents are at the centre of their children’s education, in contrast to parents of traditionally schooled children, who are at the periphery. Mayberry, Knowles, Ray, and Marlow (1995) describe home schooling as “woven into the very fabric of family life” (p. 2). Parents have a vested interest in making sure that their children
develop and maintain good standards (Oosthuizen, 2005). The enduring commitment of most parents toward their children, it is held, can exceed that of the most dedicated teachers towards their students (Nicholls, 1997). Also, a number of HBL parents choose this educational option because of their children’s medical situation or learning disability (Hartnett, 2003; Reilly, 2007).

Parents choosing HBL can be varied in terms of demographic location (Ray, 2011b), but share the common belief that parents should be primarily responsible for the education of their children. They live on different continents and can be different in terms of religion, political viewpoint, socio-economic status, and educational backgrounds (Stevens, 2001). Such parents are usually interested in, and concerned about, all dimensions of the education of their children, and committed to the guidance, nurturing and education of their children. They can be willing to take socially unorthodox ways to raise their children and to be different (Divoky, 1983, p. 397). Living in the post-modernistic era where various realities are accepted, where different perspectives are valued, and where parents can have their own life and world views and they want to educate their children according to them, it is not surprising that more parents than heretofore have opted for this alternative form of education (Leiding, 2008).

2.2.2.3 Government

In the majority of affluent countries, education is considered to be the responsibility of the government. Therefore, the government can be considered to be an HBL partner. However, a debate exists as to where the responsibility to educate children actually lies. This raises the matter of parents’ rights versus governments’ responsibility (Harding, 2011). Although most HBL practitioners consider education to be the parents’ responsibility, the government still has an influence on them in the form of registration
and monitoring. In some countries governments provide services, or contribute financially to HBL families (Clendening, 1996; Eley, 2006).

2.2.2.4 Community

Although HBL mainly takes place at home, the fourth partner, the wider community, can also play an important role in optimising this educational practice. Home-based learners can learn from members of the community and participate in activities or programmes run by such community organisations as churches, public libraries and museums, and support groups.

The success of each HBL family depends on the characteristics and mutual cooperation of these four partners. The realisation of the role of, and relationship between, the four partners in HBL can vary. How the different partners view their role or place within a partnership, can influence the HBL approach that a specific family will follow (Van Schalkwyk, 2010). Also, the support needs of an HBL family can depend on the approach to HBL that they take.

2.2.3 HBL Approaches

HBL families can differ in the way they approach the task of learning at home (Van Schalkwyk, 2010; Webb, 2010). The level of structure can range from highly structured, curriculum-driven ‘school-at-home’ practices, including some forms of distance education (Green, 2006) and accelerated learning (VanTassel-Baska & Little, 2011), to unstructured, child-led, delight-driven learning as practiced by unschoolers (Holt, 1981; Paine, 2012a; Webb, 1999). Between these two approaches a range of structures and processes can be found, including virtual homeschooling (Black, 2009; Jones, 2007), classical education (Bauer & Wise, 2004), Charlotte Mason homeschooling, flexi-schooling (Webb, 2010), Waldorf homeschooling, and Montessori-style homeschooling. Most long-time home-based learners use an eclectic approach that incorporates different
methods and resources to optimise learning for their circumstances (Barratt-Peacock, 1997).

Table 2.1: Home-Based Learning Approaches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Short description</th>
<th>Examples / Advocates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“School-at-home”,</td>
<td>Purchased a boxed curriculum with textbooks, study schedules, scope and sequence,</td>
<td>Alpha Omega Publications, Bob Jones University, A Beka Publishing, ACE, Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Traditional or structured</td>
<td>record keeping Each subject separate each day, Grade levels</td>
<td>education providers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homeschooling)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unit study</td>
<td>Incorporate all school subjects into a theme or topic of child’s interest</td>
<td>Konos, Little House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waldorf homeschooling</td>
<td>Properly laid out curriculum guide to discover main concepts on their own Stress</td>
<td>Rudolf Steiner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the importance of educating the whole child – body, mind and spirit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Intelligences</td>
<td>Goal of parents is to identify how, when, and what their child learns best and to</td>
<td>Howard Gardner, Harvard University’s “project zero”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>adapt their teaching style to their child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eclectic of “relaxed” homeschooling</td>
<td>Most often used method Use a variety of homeschool approaches, textbooks, fieldtrips</td>
<td>Home Education Magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unschooling</td>
<td>Natural, child-led, interest-led or delight driven learning Learn from everyday</td>
<td>John Holt, Beverley Paine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>life experiences Do not use school schedules or formal lessons Most unstructured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>form of homeschooling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical Education</td>
<td>Began in the Middle Ages and was the approach used by some of the greatest minds</td>
<td>Douglas Wilson, Dorothy Sayers, The Well-trained Mind by Susan Wise Bauer (2004)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in history. Goal: to teach people how to learn for themselves Five learning tools:</td>
<td>Teaching the Trivium by Bluedorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>reason, record, research, relate, rhetoric Children are taught in three stages:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Grammar Stage (ages 6-10) The Dialectic Stage (ages 10-12) The Rhetoric Stage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ages 13-18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlotte Mason</td>
<td>Children learn best in real-life situations Want to develop a love for lifelong</td>
<td>Charlotte Mason, Katherine Levison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learning Read “living books” Nature walks and diaries Good character and habits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DVD/Video Schooling</td>
<td>Use quality educational media to help child learn different subjects Can be used</td>
<td>National Geographic, The Discovery Channel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with all different styles of HBL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Homeschooling</td>
<td>Harness the power of the Internet by accessing virtual tutors, virtual schools,</td>
<td>Researched by Jones (2007), Online Curriculums, Khan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual schooling</td>
<td>online curriculum, and quality websites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Montessori Method</td>
<td>Emphasise “errorless learning” Develop full potential by learning at own pace</td>
<td>Maria Montessori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Prepared environment” Wooden tools preferred over plastic tools Discourages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>television an computers for young children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Moore Formula</td>
<td>Informal education until age 8 Balance between study, work and service Child’s</td>
<td>Raymond and Dorothy Moore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interest is focus of learning Low-cost and low-stress curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated Approach</td>
<td>The earlier education starts, the better.</td>
<td>Doreen Claggert</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexi-schooling</td>
<td>The child is sometimes in school and sometimes home.</td>
<td>Mentioned by Webb (2010)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A more comprehensive representation of different HBL approaches is given above in the Table 2.1.

Although HBL families may share certain support needs, practitioners of different approaches may also experience approach-specific needs.

2.3 HBL INTERNATIONALLY, IN AUSTRALIA AND IN WA

This section opens with an overview of the development and practice of HBL internationally and in Australia. The HBL situation in WA, with specific reference to support services, will then be considered.

2.3.1 International HBL

For most of recorded history, education had been the exclusive domain of parents. Children learned the accumulated knowledge and skills to survive and progress within the family unit (Nicholls, 1997). With the social changes taking place during the industrial revolution, a need developed for institutionalised schooling overseen by the state (Webb, 2010). Since then, most governments in Western-developed nations introduced compulsory education laws. Some parents resisted these laws and questioned the government’s authority in taking the responsibility for their children’s education away from them. Such parents either sought court approval to educate at home, or they educated their children “under the radar” (Chapman, 2012, p. 1). Prominent politicians, writers and scientists such as Abraham Lincoln, Agatha Christie, Thomas Edison and Albert Einstein, were educated at home (Meighan, 1995; Rivero, 2008). Also, up to the early 1980s children who learned at home were described as self-taught, home tutored or not having attended school (Rivero, 2008).

In the USA the modern homeschooling movement was led by John Holt. He believed that the school system is too structured and is detrimental to children’s learning. He
claimed that children have a natural eagerness to learn and that they should be given freedom in deciding what and when to learn (Meighan, 2007; Talbot, 2001). Through the publication of his first two books, *How Children Fail* in 1964 and *How Children Learn* in 1967, Holt tried to encourage schools to provide more opportunities for independent, self-directed learning. When this did not happen, he encouraged parents to teach their children at home (Bamber, 1983; Holt, 1981; Holt & Farenga, 2003; Meighan, 2007; Rivero, 2008). He pleaded for cooperation between school districts and homeschooling parents (Holt, 1983). Holt greatly influenced the legalisation of home education in the USA and by 1993, it was legal to homeschool in all 50 states (Cochran, 2010; Hunter, 1994; O'Connell, 1998). After his death in 1985, his work was continued by ‘The Holt Associates’.

Not everyone agreed with everything Holt said. Some faith-based homeschooling parents found it difficult to reconcile their highly structured approaches with that of the child-directed unschoolers. To overcome this conflict, Brown and Hood developed ‘Relaxed Christian Homeschooling’ in the 1990s (Rivero, 2008). Raymond and Dorothy Moore (Rivero, 2008) supported individualised home-based learning and advised families to follow the ‘Moore Formula’, allocating a specific time each day to study, physical work and service in the home or community (Rivero, 2008).

In England and Wales, HBL found the wording ‘or otherwise’ in the *1944 Education Act*, originally included to make provision for well-to-do families whose children were home educated by tutors and governesses, as a loop-hole to legally home educate. In 1977 the first support organisation for home-educating families in England, called ‘Education Otherwise’, was established. Today home education is a legal educational alternative in Britain (Rothermel, 2011; Webb, 2010). Parents may home school their children on a full time basis or a request can be made to a school for part time attendance by the child. Although the child must receive a full time education from the
age of five, he or she does not have to follow the national curriculum. Also, the local
council is permitted to make an inquiry as to whether the home-schooled children are
receiving a suitable education.

In New Zealand parents are permitted to home educate their children. The *Education
Act 1989* permits the Ministry of Education to grant a certificate, exempting a child
from attending a registered school if it can be shown that the child will be taught at least
as regularly and as well as in a registered school. A home-schooling supervision
allowance is paid twice a year in New Zealand to parents who meet the requirements
under which a ‘Certificate of Exemption’ is granted. The annual allowance for the first
child in a family was $743 in 2012 (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2012).

Home education is a fast growing phenomenon in many developed countries, including
the USA (Ray, 2011a, 2011b), the UK (Safran, 2010) and Australia (Harding, 2008;
Meighan, 1997). HBL is also legally practiced in Canada, Hungary, Japan, South Africa
(De Waal & Theron, 2003), and Kenya (Nicholls, 1997; Ray, 2011b). As an indication
of growth in just one jurisdiction, the number of children being homeschooled in the
USA grew from 30,000 in 1981, to 2.04 million in 2011 (Ray, 2011a).

### 2.3.2 HBL in Australia

Due to the unique character of Australia, home-based education has always been part of
the nation’s history. The following section provides a brief overview and explanation of
HBL in Australia, including legislation, difficulties in determining the extent of the
phenomenon, reasons for engaging in it, and practices.

#### 2.3.2.1 History

The first formal education in Australia commenced in homes shortly after English
settlement in 1788, and the Christian churches took over the responsibility for education
from 1793. From 1872 to the 1880s, the governments of what are now the six Australian states, established ‘compulsory, free and secular’ education acts. Since then, government schooling has become prominent in Australian education. Within the first 100 years of European settlement the responsibility for education in Australia shifted from the home, to the churches and then to the government (Austin, 1963, 1972; Cleverley, 1971; Ely, 1978). The government’s responsibility for the education of children was ratified in law in 1964 by the High Court of Australia in Ramsey vs. Larsen (Harding, 2011).

For the period 1940 to 1980, home education was seen as a ‘last-resort’ form of education for families in geographically isolated or physically-at-risk contexts (Harding, 2008). Hunter (1994) explains that the re-emergence of homeschooling in the 1980s was motivated by parental rights as a priority over government rules, a desire to maintain the family unit for as long and exclusively possible, and a fear that children would be mentally, physically or spiritually harmed within government-sponsored or supervised school environments.

2.3.2.2 Legal Situation

Parents are free to home educate their children in all States and Territories of Australia, but legislation requires home-based learners to register with the Department of Education in the respective states (Department of Education, 2012a). Despite small variations, the registration and monitoring processes are fairly similar in each state (Department of Education, 2012a). Different rules apply regarding distance education students (Harding, 2011) as they are enrolled in State accredited schools. While many families are happy to comply with homeschooling laws, many others have practised civil disobedience with respect to them (Harding, 2008, 2011; Hunter, 1994). Harding explained the motivation for this practice in his seminal study (Harding, 1997) by
referring to the tension that exists for some home-based learners between parental rights and state responsibility, resulting in HBL being practiced ‘off the radar’.

### 2.3.2.3 The Practice of HBL in Australia

The practices in Australian HBL can be divided into two groups depending on the extent of responsibility the parents take for the education of their children. The first practice is followed by parents who take full responsibility for their children’s education and get no or little structured outside help (Harding, 2008). Various authors (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Harding, 2006, 2008; Thomas, 1998) classify the range of methods used by this group into three categories: structured programs similar to those used in schools; an eclectic approach utilising a variety of resources and methods; and a natural learning or unschooling approach with little formal structure. The second practice involves government or non-government distance education, where a structured program of learning is provided for the student. In distance education, teacher support is available and the parent acts as supervisor.

### 2.3.2.4 Numbers

Several authors have pointed out that it is difficult to determine the exact number of home-based learners in Australia (Harding, 2008; Hunter, 1994), and that while governments seem to underestimate the number, home educators may overestimate them (Harding, 2008; Lindsay, 2003). The main reasons why it is difficult to determine the exact number of home-based learners in Australia, is firstly, the closed nature of some HBL communities functioning ‘under the radar’, and secondly, the range of HBL practices and terminology in use.

In 2012 the number of registered home-educated children in Australia was 10,916 (Chapman, 2013). This number is nearly 8% more than the 10,121 registered in 2011 (Chapman, 2012). The following table (Table 2.2) provides the number of registered
home-educated students, as well as the ratio of homeschooled children per 1000 school-aged children, in each of the Australian States and Territories, in 2012 (Chapman, 2013).

Table 2.2: The number of registered home-educated students in Australia in 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of registered home-educated students</th>
<th>Ratio of homeschooled children per 1000 school-aged children</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales</td>
<td>2763</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queensland</td>
<td>951</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Australia</td>
<td>1000</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>3430</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Australia</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10916</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 2.2 it is also evident that the ratio of registered home-educated students to school-aged children varies considerably between Australian States and Territories. Tasmania is the state with the highest ratio of registered home-educated students, namely, 6.4 per 1000 school-aged children. WA is the Australian state with the second highest ratio of registered HBL students, namely 3.9 per 1000 school-aged children. There were 1 889 registered HBL students in WA in 2012.

The numbers in Table 2.2 only include the registered HBL children, and not those enrolled with different distance education providers. They also do not include those families that operate ‘under the radar’. Chapman estimated that 10 000 to 30 000 home-educated students were unregistered in 2012 (Chapman, 2013). In 2008, the largest home-education group in Australia, namely, Australian Christian Academy, supported 4 000 HBL children and their families. These included both homeschool and distance education families (Harding, 2008). The number of students who are home educated through other non-government distance education providers, should be added to this.
number. Indeed, Harding (2008) estimated the number of home-educated students in Australia to be as high as 60,000.

2.3.3 HBL in WA

Where the previous section considered HBL in Australia, this section will focus on HBL in the State of WA. Only a brief overview of the development and legislation is given.

It is difficult to develop an understanding of the beginning years of HBL in WA. According to Waddy (Reilly, 2007, p. 63), two early Education Acts in WA indicated that children were educated at home. The *Elementary Act 1871* implied that parents were responsible and capable of providing education for their children at home, and the *Education Act 1928* viewed regulating home education as redundant. Reilly (2007) explained that since the beginning of 1980 a widespread concern over education in WA developed, leading to a withdrawal of children from State schools. Many families, representing a vast spectrum of philosophies, but who had a common “concern and commitment to the guidance, nurturing and education of their children” (Reilly, 2007, p. 64) decided to home school their children.

The *School Education Act 1999* grants parents educational choices. Instead of sending their school-aged children to a school, parents can register as home educators with the Chief Executive Officer at the local Department of Education office. The home educator is responsible for planning, resourcing, delivering and monitoring the child’s education, and must be able to demonstrate what progress the child has made. A representative of the Department, called a moderator, may visit the family once a year to evaluate a child’s educational progress. At the time the study reported later in this thesis was conducted, all home educators, like all educators in WA, were required to implement the *Curriculum Framework* in accordance with the *Curriculum Council Act 1997* and
the *School Education Act 1999*. The ‘Curriculum Framework’ established the learning outcomes to be achieved and includes eight ‘Learning Area Statements’ about the knowledge, skills and values deemed essential for the education of students. In a policy document, effective from 9 April 2010, the Department of Education explains that “the *Framework* should be used flexibly in the delivery and evaluation of home education” (Department of Education, 2012a n.p.). It realises that parents home educate for various reasons and acknowledges that in implementing the *Framework*, parents should “structure learning opportunities according to their children’s particular needs” (Department of Education, 2008, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). Parents may use imported curricula, provided they are used in conjunction with Australian material and cover the core areas of the WA syllabus appropriately (Hunter, 1994).

As discussed previously, it is difficult to determine how many home-based learners there are in WA. In 2012 there were 1,889 children registered as home educated at the WA Department of Education, but the number of unregistered and distance educating, is not known (Chapman, 2012). Given that WA is the Australian state with the second largest ratio of registered HBL students, it is to be expected that there is also a large number of unregistered and non-government distance education students in the State.

### 2.4 SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS FOR HBL

As the phenomenon of HBL grew internationally, nationally and in WA, it developed its own infrastructure in the form of support groups, official networks, and conferences. These, in addition to the success of HBL graduates, have been instrumental in the growth of the movement (Harding, 2008). The homeschool advocate and enthusiast, John Holt, was one of the first to identify the need to support the HBL community and endeavour to meet it. He did that through public lectures, advocacy, his book entitled *Teach Your Own* (Holt, 1981), and a magazine *Growing Without Schools*.
Although the existence of groups and individuals providing support within the HBL community is a reality, and fleeting references are made in the literature to the value of these groups (Barfield, 2002; Reilly, 2007), little substantive exploration or explanation of the support facet of the HBL phenomenon has been undertaken. In light of the scarcity of empirical literature on the functions and operation of support groupings, the world-wide-web was extensively searched for organisations providing HBL support. From the information gathered through this investigation, it became clear that support provision in HBL is diverse in practice and motivation, and takes place at different levels. On this, the researcher developed a conceptual schematic representation of HBL support in order to make sense of the wealth of information gathered. This is outlined in Figure 2.1. Here HBL support is categorised according to geographical reach (local to international) and personal involvement (virtual to real-person).

Figure 2.1: Schematic representation of HBL Support
The geographical reach of the different support providers ranges from local to international. On the local level, parents living in the same town or suburb may meet up on a regular basis for various reasons. Communication within these groups can frequently, but not exclusively, be undertaken through such online applications as Yahoo, FaceBook or e-mail lists. The next level of support includes national and State-wide HBL organisations that may host annual HBL conferences, send out periodical newsletters and have comprehensive websites. On the international level one find online HBL support groups which are accessible worldwide and include organisations that endorse a specific HBL approach.

HBL support providers can also be grouped according to the level of personal involvement their members experience. The three categories identified and represented in Figure 2.1, are virtual/web-based groups, large organisations with a web presence, and interpersonal groups.

### 2.4.1 Virtual Support

Extensive HBL support is provided online by international and Australian virtual or web-based groups. These virtual support groups are accessible worldwide and take on different formats. There are international and national internet support groups which provide detailed advice on a wide spectrum of relevant topics, including information on curricula available, legal issues, identifying children’s learning styles, and homeschool ‘burn-out’ prevention. In addition, international, national and State-wide curriculum providers have their own websites. Many of these groups provide guidelines on issues ranging from teaching children to learn to read, to successful management of household tasks, including following quick recipes. Frequently they also offer free topic-related lesson plans, worksheets, and inspirational thoughts. Although many of the virtual groups provide information on, and links to, various curriculum providers, specific
international, national and State-wide curriculum providers have their own website. In addition to promoting and selling the specific curriculum or range of curricula, these sites usually offer support and motivation.

Another form of virtual support groups are international, national and local blogs and websites hosted by current and previous HBL families. Through these virtual groups, mostly the HBL mothers, but also HBL fathers and children, share their success stories, difficulties, and offer advice. Some of the websites and blogs follow a specific religious or philosophical approach to HBL, such as Christian homeschoolers, unschoolers, or classical educators, or are dedicated to ‘big names’ and academics in the field such as John Holt, Charlotte Mason and Susan Wise Bauer. Internet support groups provide a sense of community and foster relationships between HBL families who would never otherwise meet in person. Many home-based learners find that online communities provide good support. ‘E-groups’ provide a place to ask questions, get advice from more experienced practitioners, and have discussions.

The following websites are examples of international virtual HBL support groups which fall within this category:

- **Homeschool World** ([http://www.home-school.com](http://www.home-school.com))
- **A2Z Home’s Cool** ([http://a2zhomeschooling.com](http://a2zhomeschooling.com))

These virtual HBL groups provide support to the HBL community around the world. Build into the websites are links to resource providers and blogs. For example, in 2013,
the site entitled *The Well-Trained Mind* provided links to 165 blogs by families following the classical education approach

(\url{http://www.welltrainedmind.com/homeschool-blogs/}).

Examples of virtual support groups within the Australian context include Yahoo groups like:

- *Australian Homeschoolers*  
  (\url{http://groups.yahoo.com/group/australianhomeschoolers/})

- *Christian Homeschooling in Australia*  
  (\url{http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ChristianHomeschoolinginAustralia/})

- *Australianunschoolers* (\url{http://groups.yahoo.com/group/australianunschoolers/})

The following two Australian web-based groups are also examples of national virtual groups:

- *AussieHomeschool* (\url{http://aussiehomeschool.com/welcome/}) that started in 1999 and describes itself as “the largest home education forum in the Southern Hemisphere”, offering “information, encouragement, support and a place to buy and sell” (AussieHomeschool, 2012).

- *The Educating Parent* (\url{http://homeschoolaustralia.com}) which formed in 2013 when *Homeschool Australia* (which existed from 1998) and *Unschool Australia* merged.
2.4.2 Organisations with a Web Presence

The HBL community can also get support from international, national and State-wide organisations that have a web presence and provide in-person support. The semi-virtual groups have comprehensive websites, publish their own magazines and newsletters, and sometimes host annual homeschool conferences. Some organisations provide personal contact details and help in the creation of local support groups. These groups are usually non-profit organisation run by a committee of voluntary home educators which supports and provides services for home-based learners in their country or state. Some groups subscribe to, or promote, a specific educational philosophy and curriculum, while others are open to home-based learners of all types.

The organisation, Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), is an example of an international semi-virtual group. It is a non-profit advocacy group founded in 1983. This organisation provides legal support to HBL families worldwide (HSLDA, 2011).

A number of national semi-virtual HBL organisations exist in Australia. Amongst them are Home Education Network (HEN) and Home Education Association (HEA) (Home Education Network, 2011; Wright, 2011). Although these two organisations differ in history and focus, both are non-profit organisations run by experienced home educators on a volunteer basis. Both also provide information about home education events and educational products, encourage the development of home education networks, group activities and classes, and provide support for home educating families. They provide free online home education information, publish magazines, and provide members with group benefits not usually available to individuals (Home Education Network, 2011; Wright, 2011). The Australian Homeschool Network (Paine, 2013a) is another example of an HBL support organisation.
One curriculum provider, Christian Education Ministries (CEM), can also be classified as an HBL support organisation with a web presence. Since 1982, it has provided Christian education in Australia through the use of the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum (Christian Education Ministries, 2012). In 2013, CEM had three branches in the country, namely, Australian Christian College (ACC) which is a network of K-12 schools providing both on-campus and distance education, an online learning program, CEMONLINE, that presents a biblical worldview within the Australian context, and Australian Christian Home Schooling (ACHS) which provides support and resources to families who choose to home school. In addition to providing a curriculum for distance education and homeschooling students, CEM supports HBL by providing parent training, teacher support, Year 10 and 12 certification, and local support networks.

While the accessibility of HBL support and resources on the internet lessens the need for ‘person-to-person’ support, ‘real person support’ is still deemed to be valuable in the form of different kinds of in-person organisations.

2.4.3 In-person Organisations

The last category of HBL support identified is interpersonal or real-person support. Interpersonal support involves contact between people meeting face-to-face meetings or through telephone conversations.

At the micro level there are local HBL support groups, networks, social groups and cooperatives that exist to fulfil specific functions to serve HBL families living in the same town or suburb; local homeschool support groups are groups of homeschooling parents that meet in real-life to socialise and share information and advice. The groups may organize outings and fieldtrips for children, and develop collective learning opportunities for specific subjects. They are run by voluntary, active home-educating
parents. They can vary on a continuum in terms of level of formality, openness and size. Local groups also can vary from those that engage in informal play-and-chat at a parent’s home, to those who hold formal meetings run on set rules, charging fees and setting conditions for membership. Some ‘general’ or ‘inclusive’ groups accept all homeschooling families irrespective of their homeschooling approach or religious convictions, while other groups are ‘exclusive’.

Many local, in-person groups function around the world. One example is the Ottawa Home-based Learning Network in Canada (OttawaHBLN, n.d.). This organisation is a community-based, volunteer-run, local face-to-face group, formed with the main purpose of providing ways for homeschooling families in their area to connect with other families who are interested in alternatives to the government school system. All activities are initiated and organized by members. Two other examples that exist internationally are Chicago based networks, namely, Home Orientated Unique Schooling Experience (H.O.U.S.E., 2012) and Illinois Christian Home Educators (ICHE, 2012).

A formal variant of local support groups combining home education with co-operative group education, is the homeschool cooperatives (co-op). An example of this type of support organisation is St Augustine’s Classical Christian College in WA. It consists of a group of homeschooling parents who gather to teach their children one or more days a week (Vaughan, 2003). It provides the opportunity for children collectively to learn from other parents who are more specialised in a certain area or subject. (Muldowney, 2011). Co-ops provide social interaction through teaching core subjects, electives, and sport, and can also provide opportunities for homeschooling families to gather for fellowship and social time (Muldowney, 2011). Cumberland County Homeschool Cooperative in New Jersey (Vaughan, 2003) and the Quality Homeschool Co-op in San
Antonio, Texas (Muldowney, 2011) are examples of HBL cooperatives which were the focus of recent research in the USA.

The vast array of international, national and local HBL support organisations address the diverse needs of the growing HBL community by fulfilling different functions. As technology developed, the format of support provision changed. Online support groups aimed at the HBL community developed with the introduction of the internet in the early 1980s. Since then the number and types of online support have mushroomed.

### 2.5 THE HBL SUPPORT ENVIRONMENT IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

The HBL community in WA can gain access to a wide range of support, including virtual groups, national curriculum providers and international organisations promoting a specific HBL approach. However, there are specific organisations that are based in WA that play an important role in the support of the HBL community in the State. The study reported in this thesis, focuses on these HBL support organisations.

The schematic representation of HBL support as outlined in Figure 2.1, was adjusted to represent the HBL support available in WA. Figure 2.2 outlines HBL support from a WA perspective. In this representation HBL support is again categorised according to geographical reach (local to international) and personal involvement (virtual to real-person), and WA relevant examples are included.
Literature on support organisations based in WA is limited to publications by the organisations themselves, as well as the information on their websites. The major organisations include Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) of WA, Homeschool WA, three colleges of distance education based in WA, and online communities. These organisations will now be described.

### 2.5.1 The Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) of WA

HBLN is the only official State-wide home-education support organisation in the State. It is run by a committee of home-educating parents, volunteering their time and expertise. According to their website (HBLN, 2010), it is a non-political organisation that supports the HBL community in Perth and regional WA by providing human and material resources, social contact and information. Paid membership gives access to regular workshops and seminars, the quarterly published magazine, *Learning Matters,*
and voting rights. HBLN also acts as an advocate for HBL within the wider community, and strives to build local support groups.

Most of the interpersonal groups represented in Figure 2.2 are affiliated with HBLN. At the onset of the study reported in this thesis, March 2012, there were 37 metropolitan and regional co-operatives registered under HBLN that regularly met for reasons ranging from social outings to formal classes in Latin and Logic (HBLN, 2012a). Some groups catered for children of all ages, while others, such as the Teen Group for homeschoolers older than 12 years and the Hillary’s Social Group for parents with children under six, have age requirements. Some groups catered for home-based learners working from a specific religious or philosophical worldview. They included the Natural Learning Hub catering for unschoolers, The Hive offering Christian community classes, and Catholic Homeschoolers Support Group. Some groups got together for sport activities, writing, art and drama classes, surfing, or filmmaking. There was also a group for parent-teachers of children diagnosed with autism. Geographically bounded groups operated in regional WA in Albany, Busselton, Geraldton, and the South West.

2.5.2 HomeSchool WA

HomeSchool WA is an organisation that was formed during 2012 as a support service to Christian families that wish to homeschool in WA. The support is provided in-person, or via telephone or the internet. HomeSchool WA also offers distance education through Jubilee Christian College for families who live in WA. It recommends the use of a specific K-12 Christian curriculum entitled the ‘ACE curriculum’. In the short period this organisation has existed, it developed an extended social network, with small social groups meeting frequently and having monthly network meetings. It organises regular sport days, activity days, excursions, art classes, and award nights, and offers career
advice. During 2014 the organisation extended its support network to all Australian States.

2.5.3 Distance Education Providers

There are three distance education organisations, based in WA, which provide government-approved curricula for HBL students in WA. These are Southlands, Swanonline, and the School of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE). Families registered with these organisations do not have to register as home educators with the WA Department of Education.

2.5.4 Online Communities

At the time the study reported in this thesis commenced, there were two online communities for homeschoolers in Perth. Perth Home Education Network (PHEN) is a Yahoo group with the aim of connecting families in Perth who are learning without school. It also provides links to various blogs of local HBL families (PHENetworking, 2011). Perth Homeschoolers (Perthhomeschoolers.com, 2011) is a similar online group. Although the social networks provided by both groups do not give contact details of support people, they do advertise activities for HBL in the Perth Area. During the time the study reported here took place, many other online communities associated with them were established in WA.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided a description of the context in which the HBL phenomenon is realised internationally, in Australia, and specifically in WA. The first section of the chapter explained what HBL involves and briefly highlighted the polemic surrounding terminology in the field. The next section explained how the practice of HBL developed and is realised internationally, in Australia and in WA. The general types of HBL
support available and the organisations providing this support were then detailed. Following this, the HBL support organisations functioning within WA were outlined. Chapter Three will now provide a review of the relevant research in HBL with the focus on support organisations.
CHAPTER 3
OVERVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

One of the first literary references to the practice of home-based learning is the book *Home Education* written in 1838 by Isaac Taylor, an English philosophical and historical writer. He refers to home education as ‘the education of a family under the paternal roof’ (Taylor, 1838, p. v). He explained how happiness is a necessary condition for home education and family love and order are valuable in the learning process. He proposed principles and methods of instruction that could, with some modification, be applied in other educational settings “where the number assembled around a teacher does not greatly exceed the limits of a large family” (Taylor, 1838, p. v). This number was regarded as eight to ten.

This chapter of the thesis gives an overview of the corpus of literature relevant to the study reported later in this thesis. It includes international and Australian studies regarding home-based learning (HBL). It starts with an exposition on the shortage of quality research articles on HBL in reputable journals. This is followed by an explanation of the reasons why it is difficult to get access to HBL communities, as well as a description of the problems with the quality of research in the field. A description on how the international and Australian corpus of HBL literature developed is then given. An overview of the available empirical research around the most researched HBL topics follows as does a review of studies on the support organisations available to HBL communities. The chapter concludes with an explanation of why more research in the area is necessary. In doing so, a case is outlined for the study reported in this thesis.
3.1 INTRODUCTION

Since the modern homeschool movement in the USA emerged in the late 1970s, and as more parents chose to educate their children outside of the institutionalised educational system, HBL became the focus of research projects and a slow growing body of research emerged. Supporters and opponents of this alternative form of education, wanted to determine the success of, and possible flaws in, homeschooling.

There is a paucity of articles on HBL in reputable international academic journals. This may be due to the alternative nature of HBL, and the resistance of practitioners to being under investigation. Also, there are ideological differences between HBL and the traditional view of education. The criteria for success valued by the HBL community differ from criteria for institutionalised schooling success. Furthermore, much of the HBL research is opinion based, and not empirically based. Since there are only a few researchers active in the HBL field, there is a lack of original research and the same studies are cited in different articles.

3.1.1 Resistance to Research from the HBL Communities

In many countries HBL communities are marginalised and therefore are suspicious towards research by government organisations and organisations perceived to represent the government. They consider that being the ‘object of research’ can be invasive, criticising, or a way to control them. This makes it difficult to get access to, and gain the trust of, the community. Accordingly, it is often difficult to identify participants willing to partake in a study into HBL. It is especially difficult to identify unregistered HBL families who are not affiliated with any groups.

Different researchers mention the difficulty in getting participants for research into HBL. Sozcka (2007) described the difficulty she had obtaining participants for her study
into how homeschooling children develop their postsecondary plans and whether there is a need for a third party to give guidance to the students. She contacted homeschooling families and organisations in the USA directly. She had identified them through the internet and from personal contacts. No individual family and only one organisation was willing to take part in the research. After reading the research proposal, the spokesperson for the organisation felt that the title was presenting homeschoolers in a negative light. Therefore he declined participation. After lengthy discussion to convince the group of the value of the research, the organisation agreed to participate, but only if the researcher changed the data collection method from the intended personal interviews to an anonymous survey.

A researcher needs to invest time and effort to develop a trusting relationship with HBL organisations. This is illustrated by the experience of Bell (2013) in her Ph.D. thesis on the motivational climates and teaching strategies of homeschooling parents in Pennsylvania. She worked closely with the leader of a homeschool organisation to achieve a 51% response rate on an online survey. She also found that “homeschoolers are willing to tell their stories if trust between the researching team and the homeschooling community can be established” (Bell, 2013, p. 58).

### 3.1.2 Quality of Research

Some who have examined HBL research have concluded that many of the documented studies were not of a type that would be accepted by academic journals due to their research design. Ray (2011b) mentioned research design limitations, such as biased samples (Hunter, 1994; Townsend, 2012; Webb, 2010) and small, self-selected samples (Barratt-Peacock, 1997). Some studies only focus on one, non-representative, self-selected group. Another concern with research is that the prominent home-education research distributor, National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI), may be
strongly associated with the conservative, Christian end of the HBL community, and thus may not represent the wider HBL community.

3.2 RESEARCH ON HBL

As the home-schooling movement developed and grew from the late 1970s, practitioners, government organisations, advocates and opponents wanted to know what home schooling entails, the methods parents use, and whether or not this alternative form of education is successful. A few different people and organisations started to engage in research on home schooling. However, the quality of the research was not always of a high standard. Some of the research focused around the reasons why parents chose to home educate their children, the academic achievement of home-educated children, the socialisation, self-concept or self-esteem of home-schooled children, as well as the academic or employment outcome when the children were beyond school age (Nicholls, 1997). An overview of the associated literature is now provided under two sub-headings, namely international literature and Australian literature.

3.2.1 International Literature

One of the first scholarly reviews of the home-schooling movement was undertaken by Lines (1987), a policy analyst of the USA Department of Education, and appeared in *Phi Delta Kappan* in 1987. She gave an overview of home-schooling practices, including numbers and curricula, and variations in state regulations. She reported that homeschool parents’ demographic profiles, pedagogies, ideologies and motivations were widely varied. She referred to the existence of “a loose nationwide network of homeschoolers” (Lines, 1987, p. 516) and the supporting organisations which helped the homeschoolers in their dealings with public officials.
The following year, 1988, Van Galen published the results of her doctoral thesis, *Schooling in Private: A Study of Home Education* (Van Galen, 1986), in *Education and Urban Society* (Van Galen, 1988b). As a participant observer, Van Galen investigated the motivations and pedagogies of home-schooling families in some south-eastern states of the USA. She interviewed state and local education officials and home-schooling parents, attended home-school events, and analysed five years of home-school newsletters. She classified home-schooling parents in terms of their motivations and values as ‘ideologues’ and ‘pedagogues’. Despite Lines’ earlier evidence of the movement’s complex landscape, Van Galen’s dichotomous simple typology became popular. Ideologues were defined as those who objected to the content taught in public and private schools, and who intended to use home schooling as a means of instilling their religious beliefs and political and social values in their children. This group of home-schooling parents patterned their home schools after traditional schools, used correspondence courses, and only provided support when a child encountered procedural difficulties. Pedagogues were described as being more in disagreement with the public school’s teaching approaches than with its content. They found evaluating a child’s learning in terms of group norms of achievement particularly upsetting. Parents in this group had professional training in education, or were well-informed on how children learn and develop. They strove to create an educational environment that was qualitatively different from conventional schools and expressed a strong commitment to their children’s individuality and autonomy. They further encouraged their children to critically evaluate the materials they encountered.

Despite their differences, these two groups found common ground in their eschewing of government involvement in their parenting and education of their children. Van Galen found that ‘ideologues’ were more likely to join organisations and engage in political activism as an expression of their convictions. She also found that as they felt more
successful in their teaching, they too began to question their beliefs about the nature of school and the constraints of a traditional curriculum. Over time and with experience, the home-schooling parents that Van Galen studied were inclined to create a more responsive learning environment for their children.

Since the early research by Lines (1987) and Van Galen (1986), the body of research into home schooling and other forms of HBL has grown. In 2000, *The Peabody Journal of Education*, a mainstream academic journal in the USA, dedicated an entire issue to home education (Volume 75, Issues 1&2). Articles focused on the historical context of home education, the then current pedagogical practices, and the theoretical implications. In 2003, the UK-based journal, *Evaluation and Research in Education*, also dedicated a special issue to home education (Volume 17, Number 2&3), publishing eleven papers from seven countries, including an article on Australian home education by Barratt-Peacock. The November 2009 issue of *Theory and Research in Education* was also devoted to home schooling. In 2013, *The Peabody Journal of Education* revisited parent-led home-based education and devoted another entire issue to the growing educational movement (Volume 88, Issue 3).

A few research organisations like NHERI in the USA, the Canadian Centre for Home Education (CCHE), and the International Center of Home Education Research (ICHER), specialise in home-school research. NHERI was founded by Dr. Brian D. Ray in 1990. In addition to publishing the research conducted by him, the institute also collects and interprets national and international home-education research, and disseminates the information to the home-based community, to researchers, to policymakers and to the general public. NHERI also publishes a refereed academic journal called *Home School Researcher*. NHERI and CCHE are associated with Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), an advocacy organisation established to defend and advance the rights of parents to direct the education of their children and to protect
family freedoms. ICHER was founded in 2012 by a group of international scholars. It is not an advocacy group. Rather, it provides independent information about home schooling, offers detailed analyses of emerging research, and encourages networking and collaboration among scholars in the home-education field.

An examination of the empirical literature on homeschooling reveals that the majority of early studies have been undertaken in USA or Britain. As the movement spread around the world, other research projects were also undertaken in other countries. The countries include China (Sheng, 2013), Canada (Neven Van Pelt, Allison, & Allison, 2009), Czech Republic (Kostelecká, 2010), Germany (Spiegler, 2010), India (Chudgar, Miller, & Kothari, 2012), Israel (Neuman & Aviram, 2003), Japan (Kemble, 2005), Norway (Beck, 2010), Russia (Staroverova, 2011) and South Africa (De Waal & Theron, 2003; Oosthuizen, 2005).

### 3.2.2 Australian Literature

Despite the long history of HBL in Australia, there is only a small, albeit growing body of Australian research into HBL. Most of this is contained in unpublished theses but there are also some published works available. This literature includes professional journal articles, books, and documents from parliamentary reviews and departments of education. The topics relate to the reasons parents home educate, demographic information, studies of how parents manage the home-educating process, student perceptions, special needs, academic success, the process of learning in home schooling, student competencies and social development, legislative and legal situations in all States of Australia, and home education as an alternative form of education in rural areas (Jackson, 2011).

One of the first Australian studies on home education was undertaken by Krivanek in 1985. It involved a survey of 13 members of the Alternative Education Research Group.
(AERG) in Melbourne. She established that families chose to educate their children outside the institutionalised school system to provide a natural, stimulating, secure, competition-free milieu in which they could learn in an unstructured way (Home Education Network, 2004; Krivanek, 1985). Despite aspiring for ‘an unstructured learning situation’, however, all but one of the families studied, used a formal curriculum and time-table for part of each day.

For the next few years, research projects were mainly conducted within the group of home educators that used the Accelerated Christian Education (ACE) curriculum. The reason why research focused on this group was probably because it is the largest HBL group in Australia (Harding, 2008), is easily identifiable, and is open about its home-education practices. However, focussing only on this one group, limited the applicability of the outcomes to the wider HBL community in Australia. Researchers active in this area included Mullaly (Home Education Network, 2004) and Harding (1997, 2006). Mullaly explored why parents home educate for extended periods. He surveyed 147 families from across five Australian States that were using the ACE materials. He found that parents who home educated over an extended period developed an enhanced sense of self-worth, strong relationships with their children, and a sense of achievement and personal satisfaction (Home Education Network, 2004). Harding (1997) explored the reasons why families, using the ACE curriculum, choose to home school. He also studied the post home-education study pathways of 438 home-educated students (Harding, 2006).

Two other researchers, Hunter (1994) and Thomas (1998), described the broader home-education practice in Australia at the time. Hunter attributed the growth in home education to parents who valued their parental rights in education over that of the state, parents’ desire to maintain family unity, and their fear that attending school would be detrimental to their children. Thomas’ interest in individualised learning led him to
examine home education in Australia and in the UK. He interviewed 100 home-
educating families and used socio-cultural theory to describe how the children learn. His

The first Australian Ph.D. thesis in the area of home education was written by Barratt-
Peacock in 1997 at La Trobe University. The title was *The Why and How of Australian
Home Education* (Barratt-Peacock, 1997). He interviewed 186 home-educating families
from across Australia and from a wide range of home-educating practices. A smaller
number was interviewed a second and third time, and then observed for a full day.
Barratt-Peacock described the Australian home-educating family as “a community of
learning practice” (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, p. 270) and came to the conclusion that the
decision to home educate was influenced by the background of the parents, a crisis, the
influence of an informant-mentor and confirming experiences. Although many
similarities between the why and how of Australian home education and overseas
research were found, he also identified differences. For example, in Australia most
homeschooling families were opposed to government involvement and wanted to take
responsibility for their children’s lives and education themselves, while in the USA, the
resistance of government interference was mostly limited to Christian homeschoolers.
He also found that where American studies indicated that negative childhood
experiences motivated American parents to home educate, Australian home educators
indicated a desire to recreate their own positive childhood experiences.

In 2000, Chapman and O’Donoghue (2000) outlined an emerging research agenda for
home education that provided research questions on four aspects of the home-education
phenomenon. The four areas were the reasons for home schooling, the academic
achievements and social development of home-educated students, the characteristics of
homeschooling families and categories of parents, and how parents manage the home-
education process.
A number of doctoral studies focusing on HBL aspects were completed after 2000 and partly answered some of Chapman and O’Donoghue’s questions. Reilly (2007) investigated how parents deal with home schooling their children with intellectual disabilities, while Jackson (2009) studied home-educated students’ transitions between home and school. Reilly used individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to gather data from nine families on how they deal with home schooling their children with intellectual disabilities. The interviews were supplemented with participant observation. She developed a theory about the three phases of progressive modification that parents go through when starting to home educate their intellectually disabled child.

Jackson (2009) interviewed parents, home-educated children, and educational professionals who had been involved in transitions out of or into mainstream institutions. The data were analysed using perspectives from historical sociocultural, critical and identity theories. Jackson concluded that home-educated students moving into or out of mainstream educational institutions benefitted academically, socially and through personal development from their transition experiences in both directions.

Harding (2011) studied parents’ conceptions of their roles as home educators of their children. He interviewed 27 home-educating parents. From the data analysis, four categories of parent home-educator roles emerged. These parents saw themselves in the role of learner, partner, teacher and advocate. As learner they needed to gain knowledge and skills in order to both commence and to continue home education. As partner they provided the family’s educational infrastructure in an educational partnership, usually with their spouses. As teachers of their children they facilitated their education and development. Finally, they saw themselves as educational pioneers in their communities.

Another doctoral study was written by Danaher (2001) who investigated the educational experiences of the primary school children travelling along the agricultural show
circuits’ in coastal and western Queensland. These children followed a specialised program of Traveller-education offered by the Brisbane School of Distance Education. Although Danaher’s study does not directly refer to home education, it is relevant when looking at HBL in a broader sense.

The Australian research on home education was summarised in a document by Jackson from the Faculty of Education of Monash University and published on the HEA-website (Jackson, 2011). This document was originally developed in reaction to legislative changes by the State government of Victoria. It was presented to the Minister of Education and Training of Victoria in reaction to comments by Department officials on the scarcity of Australian research on home education.

3.3 THEMES MOST RELEVANT TO THE STUDY

This section briefly addresses the main topics of research in the HBL field. First, studies on the reasons why parents choose to home educate their children are discussed. Secondly, a discussion of studies focussed on the questions of academic achievement and social development of HBL students follows. Thirdly, a short review of research on characteristics of HBL families and HBL approaches is given. The section concludes with an overview of research on support organisations for HBL.

3.3.1 Reasons for HBL

The matter of what motivates parents to home educate their children had been explored in nearly all countries where there are home educators, including the USA (Lines, 1991; Olsen, 2008; Van Galen, 1988b), the UK (Rothermel, 2011; Safran, 2008; Thomas, 1998), Germany (Spiegler, 2010), the Czech Republic (Kostelecká, 2010), Norway (Beck, 2010), and South Africa (Oosthuizen, 2005). The research approach employed in answering this question included surveys, participant observations, and interviews.
(Harding, 2011; Mayberry & Knowles, 1989; Mayberry et al., 1995). Considering these studies from around the world, the main motivators identified were lifestyle choice, family relationships, religious reasons, dissatisfaction with the teaching methods used in schools, disagreement between the parents and schools, and parents’ fears for the safety of their children. Other reasons included flexibility for travelling families (Oosthuizen, 2005), economic reasons (Webb, 2010), and a measure of fulfilment and autonomy for full-time mothers (Stevens, 2001).

The reasons for home schooling were also explored by a number of Australian authors (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, 2003; Harding, 1997, 2008). They found that Australian parents chose to home educate their children to convey their beliefs and values to their children, to sustain or create close family relationships, to ensure their children’s academic success, and to ensure positive social interaction for their children by, for example avoiding negative peer influences. Some children also learnt at home because of practical reasons, such as geographical isolation, or to support their special educational and health reasons.

### 3.3.2 Academic Achievements and Social Development of HBL Students

The social experience and development of home-educated students were the focus of a number of empirical studies evaluated by Medlin (2000, 2013). His review of research on homeschooled children’s socialisation indicated that “homeschooling parents expect their children to respect and get along with people of diverse backgrounds, provide their children with a variety of social opportunities outside the family, and believe their children’s social skills are at least as good as those of other children” (Medlin, 2013, p. 284). Research has also suggested that homeschooled children have higher quality friendships and better relationships with their parents and other adults compared to children attending conventional schools. Homeschooled children are often happy,
optimistic, and satisfied with their lives, and their moral reasoning is at least as advanced as that of other children. Also, they may be more likely to act unselfishly. As adolescents, they have a strong sense of social responsibility and often exhibit less emotional turmoil and problem behaviours than their peers. Those homeschooled children who go on to university are socially involved and open to new experiences.

Medlin also found that children who had been home educated became civically involved adults who functioned competently in many areas of life. The study also indicated that home-educated children had broad, healthy social interactions, and made special mention of the value of home-education network groups in establishing appreciated interaction with peers (Muldowney, 2011). Studies also showed that some students who had been hurt socially at school were able to recover when home educated. In Australia, the socialisation of home-educated children was investigated by Jackson (2007), Barratt-Peacock (1997) and Brosnan (1991). They found that home education had a positive effect on students’ personal growth and self-concept.

During the past 25 years, numerous studies have been completed, mainly in the USA, that examined the academic achievement of home-educated children (Ray, 2010, 2013). Examples of these studies range from a multi-year study in a single USA state (Wartes, 1988), state-specific studies, nationwide studies (Rudner, 1999), to a nationwide, longitudinal Canadian study of home-educated graduates (Neven Van Pelt et al., 2009). In most studies, the home-educated students scored, on average, higher on standardised academic achievement tests compared to their peers in the public and private school system. Ray also surveyed over 7,000 adults who had been home schooled and compared them to their more traditionally educated peers. The study focused on these adults’ general demographic profiles, attitudes toward their own home-education experience, and success in life. Success was evaluated with respect to civic, social, educational, employment, and worldview characteristics. His research also found that
the participants were in some aspects very ‘normal’, while in other aspects remarkably
different from the general population in the USA. The home-educated adults had, on
average, a higher comprehension of politics and government, participated more
regularly in on-going community service activities, were more likely to be members of
organisations (community groups), and voted in national and state elections (NHERI,
2013).

A few Australian studies focused on the pathways home-educated students follow after
they finish their ‘schooling’. Harding (2011) referred to unpublished works by Carins
(2002) and McColl (2005) on the success of home-educated students in gaining
entrance to higher and further education. Harding (2006) contributed to research on this
by studying the post home education study pathways of 438 home-educated students.
He found that 36% entered university, while another 21% entered TAFE colleges to
study diploma courses, and 43% followed apprenticeships and certificate courses at
TAFE colleges. This study demonstrated not only that home-educated graduates are
gaining entrance into universities and colleges, but also that, as adults, they express
satisfaction about their childhood educational experiences (Harding, 2008).

Harding (2011) referred to an unpublished study by himself in 2003, which compared
the academic achievements of home schooled and distance educated students, and found
no significant difference between the groups. However, as with the other three studies
mentioned above, the research only focused on one specific group of home-based
learners, namely those following the ACE curriculum. Consequently the results of these
studies may not be applicable to all HBL graduates in Australia.

3.3.3 Characteristics of HBL Families and HBL Approaches

Since the first study by Van Galen (1986) in the context of the USA, a number of
studies were undertaken that focused on the characteristic of HBL families and parents,
and how parents manage the home-education process. Parents choosing HBL are
demographically varied (Ray, 2011b), but share the common belief that parents should
be the primarily responsible for the education of their children. HBL parents come from
different continents and represent a range of religions, political viewpoints, socio-
economic groups, population groups and educational backgrounds (Stevens, 2001).

Harding (2008) and Chapman (2012) determined that the HBL approaches followed in
Australia can be classified as structured ‘school-at-home’, as unschooling or as eclectic.
In a study discussed earlier in this chapter, Harding (2011) contributed to the
understanding of homeschooling families and how parents manage the home-education
process. He found that “being an advocate for home education” or “supporting other
home educators” (Harding, 2011, p. 206) were important to home-educating parents.
This may explain why many HBL parents are involved as volunteers in organising
support groups or services for other home educators.

3.3.4 Research on Support Organisations for HBL

Although frequent references are made to the value of support organisations in the
professional literature, few studies have focused on these organisations. Amongst all of
the doctoral studies identified that have been completed internationally, only four had
HBL support as a focus. One study focused on homeschool-parent support groups
within the USA context, two studies focused on homeschooling cooperatives (co-ops)
and one investigated the role of school boards in supporting home-educating parents. A
short review of each of these studies follows.

In the late 1980s, when the modern homeschooling movement started to gain legal
acceptance in the USA, Bishop (1991) studied the concerns and functions of
homeschool parent support in Kansas. She used the then recently developed naturalistic
inquiry research approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that has an emerging research
design, purposive sampling, inductive data analysis, and a case study reporting mode. Data were collected from 11 of a possible 18 homeschool support groups in Kansas. She collected her data through interviews with the eleven homeschool support-group leaders, observations of the groups’ activities, and document analysis. Data gathering and data analysis took place simultaneously.

Bishop identified five functions of homeschool support groups that emerged as a reaction to the major concerns within the homeschooling community in Kansas. The groups provided legislative and legal information, created a sense of belonging for homeschooling families in a time when they experienced social and legal pressures, and provided educational group activities and programs for homeschooling families. At that time, not many curricula were available for homeschoolers. Thus the support groups held curriculum fairs and seminars to share information on teaching approaches. Some support groups administered standardized tests. Group members exchanged educational resources, curriculum materials, and equipment. Lastly, more experienced homeschooling families mentored new families. Bishop identified other emerging concerns, namely programs for older children, teaching credentials, unrealistic expectations, maintaining open membership, dealing with ‘adult peer pressure’, public education, and relationships with public schools, which were at that stage not developed into functions fulfilled by support organisations.

More than 25 years later, when this study was conducted, the homeschooling scene looks different. Not all the functions and concerns identified by Bishop are still relevant and new concerns have emerged. The functions and concerns of homeschool support groups may also differ in different geographical areas.

Muldowney (2011) studied the history and daily operation of a homeschool co-op that formed in 2005 in San Antonio, Texas. She interviewed four co-op members involved at
different levels of the co-op, observed the co-op in action, and reviewed relevant
documents. Through triangulation of interviews, observations, and documents,
Muldowney described the history of the co-op, including its founding and daily
operations. She found that co-ops provided social interaction through teaching core
subjects, electives, athletics, and serving as an opportunity for homeschooling families
to gather for fellowship and social time. The participants were pleased with the quality
of academic classes and the positive socialisation that the co-op provided. This study
made a valuable contribution to literature on HBL support.

Vaughan (2003) studied three homeschool co-ops in New Jersey, the state in the USA
where there is virtually no regulation of homeschooling, no guidelines for curriculum,
no required parent-teacher education, or no mandatory student testing. Despite
homeschooled students performing well academically and having been admitted to over
500 colleges across the nation, educators criticized this practice. The public school
educators argued that home schooling provided for neither the socialisation needs nor
the extra-curricular experiences offered by the public schools. Homeschool co-ops
developed to address these needs by providing small group instruction, participation in
extra-curricular activities, and experience learning activities. They combine home
education with co-operative group education.

Vaughan (2003) used descriptive, qualitative methods to determine what motivated
homeschooling parents to take part in a homeschool co-op. She interviewed 69 parents
and 58 homeschool co-op students individually and in small groups. She also conducted
participant observations at the co-ops. The results were discussed with public school
officials in order to get their input. The study indicated that homeschoolers took part in
coops that addressed their main needs, whether for socialisation, curriculum or
lifestyle. Vaughan confirmed the findings of Harrison (1996) that the support provided
by homeschool co-ops were motivational for some parents in their choice to educate their children at home, while other parents valued sharing the education experience.

Clendening (1996) investigated the role of school boards in supporting Canadian parents in home educating their children. The needs of home-educating parents were compared with the existing functions of the school board administrators. He made recommendations to how the school boards could improve their roles for assisting parents. These recommendations included improved access to resources and facilities, curriculum support, and encouraging other educators to support home-educating parents in the task.

From all the studies considered, a number of implications can be drawn that can inform the different stakeholders within the HBL field. Considering the topics of the growing body of research into home education, it may be that the key aspects of Chapman and O’Donoghue’s (2000) research agenda have been addressed (Harding, 2011). However, at closer examination, it becomes evident that they provide only a glimpse of specific aspects and that many gaps still exist. Much more research is needed to understand the HBL phenomenon and especially the organisations supporting HBL in Australia, including in WA.

### 3.4 NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND THIS STUDY

Despite the number of studies completed, the uniqueness of each HBL community necessitates further investigation on the many facets of HBL in order to make a contribution to fully understanding this alternative form of education. Practical and relevant research is needed to describe and analyse the conceptual basis of HBL in general and HBL support groups in specific. This will help to improve understanding and communication around the HBL phenomenon, and will be valuable in
communicating with local, district and state-level public education administrators in order to review their attitudes and procedures regarding this practice.

In 1991, Bishop (1991) wrote that there was insufficient professional literature on homeschool parent support groups, and suggested that further studies be undertaken to describe, analyse and interpret these groups at local, state and national level in order to “achieve greater objectivity in determining the value and authenticity of the homeschooling experience” (Bishop, 1991, p. 174). She recommended that the research should focus on the many functions that these groups provide, the aims and purposes which unify these partnerships, the benefits of group membership and the organisational structures that support these groups. This sentiment was echoed by Reilly when she stressed homeschooling had suffered from a “lack of rigorous research on many aspects of the practice” (Reilly, 2007, p. 14). Stevens (2001) and Van Schalkwyk (2010) concurred with this view.

Although a substantial number of research projects in the HBL area have been undertaken since Bishop made her suggestions, few addressed her recommendations regarding support organisations, and in particular, support organisations within the Australian and Western Australian context. The study reported in later chapters goes some way towards addressing the deficit for the Western Australian situation.

3.5 CONCLUSION

After reviewing the available literature, it is clear that no adequate theory exists describing the phenomenon of HBL support organisations internationally, in Australia and, more specifically in WA. Recognising that homeschooling plays an important role in the education of an increasing number of children in WA and around the world, and the lack of information about support organisations for them, the study reported in later
chapters addressed this matter for WA. The next chapter, Chapter Four, outlines the methodology used.
CHAPTER 4
METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The overview of the literature related to home-based learning (HBL) and HBL support groups presented in the previous chapter indicated that although a substantial body of research exists on various aspects of HBL, few studies have focused on HBL support groups. In particular, no research has investigated the historical background to HBL support organisations in Australia, and more specifically in Western Australia (WA). Also, there has been no research on the functions of these organisations, the concerns of their leaders and the strategies they use to deal with those concerns within the WA context. The study reported in the remaining chapters of this thesis is one response to addressing the deficit.

This research was guided by three aims. The first aim was to develop an understanding of the background of HBL support groups in WA, with specific reference to the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN). The second aim was to develop an understanding to the functions of HBLN as HBL support group in WA, given the diverse needs of the HBL community in WA. The third aim was to develop an understanding of the concerns of the leaders of HBL support groups in WA in carrying out their functions. It was anticipated that the responses to these three aims would provide a detailed understanding of the role of HBL support groups in supporting the HBL community in WA.

Geographically, WA is the largest State in Australia and had the second highest ratio of registered homeschooled children per 1000 school-aged children in 2012, namely 3.9 (Chapman, 2013) at the time of data collection. In addition to these registered homeschooled children, a large number of home-based learners are either unregistered
or home educated through non-government distance education. Homeschooling parents can get ‘support’ in their homeschooling undertaking from various providers. Locally, a formal network, the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) and informal groups exist to fulfil specific functions.

The research methodology of the study is discussed in the remainder of this chapter. This will be done under eight main headings. First, the central research questions will be given. Secondly, the nature of the interpretivist paradigm, the associated theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, and the grounded theory position that underpin the study, are outlined. Thirdly, the study population and the selection of study participants are presented. Fourthly, the methods of data gathering, analysis, recording and storage used in the study are presented. Fifthly, the manner in which the theoretical framework was adapted in relation to each of the three research questions is considered. Sixthly, an outline of the strategies that were implemented to ensure the quality of data and explored the trustworthiness of the grounded theory generated, follows. Seventhly, a brief explanation of the significance of the study is presented. Finally, ethical issues that were considered in conducting the study are presented.

### 4.2 THE CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following three interrelated central research questions were based on the three aims of the study and guided the choice of research methodology:

1. *What is the historical background to the HBL support groups, and specifically the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) in WA?*

2. *What are the functions of the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) in WA?*
3. What are the issues of concern for HBL support groups in WA, with particular reference to the largest of these groups, namely, the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN)?

4.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The aims and associated research questions could have been approached in a number of ways drawing upon a variety of research paradigms. However, it was determined that the most productive way to proceed was by conceptualising the central questions in relation to the interpretivist paradigm. Also, the theoretical perspective within the interpretivism paradigm that was deemed appropriate to assist in understanding meaning in this study, was symbolic interactionism. The research methods used were document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Grounded Theory methods, consistent with the paradigm and theoretical perspective, were used for data gathering and data analysis.

4.3.1 The Interpretivist Paradigm

This enquiry into the historical background of HBL support organisations in WA, their functions, and issues of concern for these organisations, required a method of investigation that would allow for the interpretation of social phenomena by revealing the different meanings constructed by people in a social context (Gubrium & Holstein, 2005). The worldview or paradigm of interpretivism was chosen.

Interpretivists believe that meaning is constructed and not discovered. They believe that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Objects, as Crotty put it, “may be pregnant with potential meaning, but actual meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them” (Crotty, 2003, p. 43). Interpretivism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality,
is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Guba and Lincoln concur with this when they state that

Knowledge consists of those constructions about which there is relative consensus among those competent … to interpret the substance of the construction. Multiple “knowledge” can coexist when equally competent (or trusted) interpreters disagree, and/or depending on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors that differentiate the interpreters. These constructions are subject to continuous revision, with changes most likely to occur when relatively different constructions are brought into juxtaposition in a dialectical context (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 113).

Interpretivism is contrary to objectivism, which holds that there is “objective truth and that appropriate methods of inquiry can bring us accurate and certain knowledge of that truth” (Crotty, 2003, p. 42).

The interpretivist paradigm was chosen because, as Creswell (2007) explains, social constructivism is the system in which individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for a complexity of views rather than narrow meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of associated research, then, is to rely as much as possible on participants’ views of the situation.

Often subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, meanings are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives. Rather than starting with a theory as a hypothesis (as in positivism), constructivist researchers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000).
Within the interpretivist paradigm broad and general questions are asked so that participants can reveal their constructions of the situation; “the more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). The interpretivist researcher focuses on the specific context in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural setting of the participants.

Congruent with the interpretivist paradigm, the researcher recognises that her own background shapes her interpretation. She positions herself in the research to acknowledge how interpretation flows from own personal, cultural, and historical experiences. The researcher’s own experiences and background shape the interpretation of the results. The researcher’s intent is to make sense of, or interpret the meanings others have about the world.

This way of thinking about the generation of theory excludes the worldview of positivism which views research as a series of logically related steps and following rigorous methods of quantitative data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2007). Also, positivist research does not have an advocacy or participatory world view since it does not aim to advocate for action to help individuals or groups. It does not have an “action agenda” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21) for reform that may change the lives of participants and the institutions in which they live and work. The pragmatic worldview, which focuses on outcomes and is concerned about applications that solve problems rather than antecedent conditions (Patton, 2002), was also deemed inappropriate for the study being reported here.

The underlying epistemology of the research topic distinguishes it as a qualitative study. Qualitative inquiry represents an appropriate way of social and human science exploration. Through qualitative research, the researcher tries to understand how
somebody else understands the world. It aims to generate locally relevant theory about the perspectives of participants, through exploring and developing a complex, detailed understandings of an issue (Creswell, 2007). In the study reported later in this thesis, understandings could only be developed by talking directly to the people involved in the HBL support practices. Through qualitative research, the HBL support-group leaders were facilitated in sharing their perspectives. In the absence of existing theory, the objective was to generate theory to adequately capture the complexity of the background, functions and issues of concern for HBL support groups in WA.

4.3.2 Symbolic Interactionism

Within the interpretive approach the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism was adopted. This theoretical position emphasises social interaction as the basis for knowledge, and concurs with the interpretivist view that interaction between human beings is essential to understanding meanings. The symbolic interactist perspective of life, society and the world was first conceptualised by George Herbert Mead, but was continued after his death by Herbert Blumer. This approach was chosen for the study reported later in this thesis because it allows the researcher to unveil people’s perspectives on a phenomenon (O’Donoghue, 2007).

The study was concerned with revealing the perspectives of the HBL support-group leaders on the phenomenon of HBL support in WA. Perspectives, the central concept within the interpretivist paradigm, are the frameworks or concept maps through which people make sense of the world (Woods, 1992). These can only be accessed by talking to people. In adopting this position, primary importance is placed on the social meanings people attach to the world around them and how they respond to them (Steven & Taylor, 1998). To put it another way, the interdependency between the individual and society is recognised. This was put succinctly by Blumer (1969, p. 2) when he stated
that “human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them”, that “the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interactions that one has with one’s fellows” and that “these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process by the person dealing with the things he encounters”. The individual and society cannot be understood without an understanding of each other. This is a view of the individual as somebody who is a manager of his or her own environment. The same position has been articulated more recently by Charmaz (2006) and Creswell (2013). The communication process using common language, is the mechanism by which meanings are shared (Crotty, 1998).

The task of the researcher using this approach is to uncover the “patterns of action and interaction” between and among the “actors” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 2008) in relation to the particular phenomenon which is the focus of the study. In the study reported later in this thesis the researcher entered the setting of the people being studied to determine their particular definition of the situation, what they took into account, and how they interpreted their function (Schwandt, 2007, p. 248).

4.3.3 Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a method that can be used to generate theory about issues of importance in people’s lives (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1968; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The grounded theory method was developed by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser, 1978, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1968; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Later on one branch of it evolved into constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 2008).

The constructivist grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser, 1992) is consistent with the interpretivist paradigm. Accordingly, it can be used to generate theory which is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed from
the empirical world (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1994, 2008). The essence of the grounded theory approach is to describe and understand human behaviour within its social context, rather than to evaluate and measure for accuracy (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986).

Grounded theory methods follow an inductive approach to data gathering and data analysis. This enables final propositions to be generated from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Semi-structured interviews and document study were the data-gathering methods used in the reported study. The grounded theory methods of open-coding and analytical induction were used to analyse the data and formulate propositions (Steven & Taylor, 1998). Throughout the research process, data gathering and data analysis took place simultaneously, with each informing and focusing the other (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The researcher analysed data by constant comparison, initially of data with data, followed by comparisons between interpretations. This constant comparison of analysis grounded the researcher’s experiences (Mills, Bonner, & Francis, 2006). These research methods, which, as has been pointed out, are also consistent with the interpretivist view of human action (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986), offer a comprehensive and systematic framework for inductively generating theory. The outcome of adopting such an approach is the development and verification of substantive theory (Glaser, 1978; Woods, 1992).

4.4 STUDY POPULATION AND PARTICIPANT SELECTION

4.4.1 Study Population

Regarding the First Research Question:

The study population regarding the first research question included all past and present HBL support groups in WA, but mostly HBLN, the only State-wide HBL support group in WA at the time the study reported in this thesis took place. While this research
question was primarily addressed through document analysis, subsequent interviews with HBL support-group leaders were also drawn upon.

Regarding the Second Research Question:

The study population regarding the second research question was HBLN, the only State-wide HBL support group in WA at the time the study reported in this thesis took place. The reason for focusing on HBLN was logistics; the project would have been too big if all smaller and local groups were to be studied in depth. This research question was investigated largely through document analysis, supplemented by a series of semi-structured individual interviews with HBL support-group leaders.

Regarding the Third Research Question:

The study population regarding the third research question was all HBL support groups at the time of data collection in general, but with particular reference to the main group, namely HBLN. In investigating this research question, the researcher focused on the leaders of HBLN because of the potential of these individuals to provide rich description of the issues of concern within the HBL environment in WA. This research question was investigated through semi-structured individual interviews with the leaders of HBLN.

4.4.2 Participant Selection

Participants were chosen through theoretical sampling strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) based on the notions of purposeful sampling and maximum variation sampling (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The first interview was with the president of HBLN. This interview was transcribed and analysed before the second interview took place. The subsequent individual interviews were undertaken with the other HBL support-group leaders. These were purposefully selected for maximum variation.
Criteria for ‘divergence’ were developed, and leaders who met the criteria were systematically interviewed. These criteria included type of group, philosophical approach, location, and the length of time for which groups have existed. By consciously seeking out diversity amongst participants studied (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982), ‘dense’ or ‘density’, as described by Glaser (2010), was achieved in the substantive grounded theory developed.

Theoretical sampling includes sampling of typical cases, extreme or deviant cases, critical cases and politically important cases, as well as maximum variation sampling, until saturation is reached. The sampling was flexible, emergent and purposeful. It was not done ‘statistically’. In contrast, it included ‘outliers’. Constraints of time and finances meant that the study was limited to the Perth metropolitan area. Thus, to some extent, the population studied was also a ‘population of convenience’ since groups geographically far from the Perth metropolitan area were not selected.

Participant selection and data gathering ended when the criteria of “informational redundancy” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 202) and saturation had been reached. Since members of a particular community were interviewed, this happened, as anticipated, after twelve in-depth interviews with participants selected in a manner already indicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

After twelve interviews saturation did occur, because little new information surfaced and no new categories were generated. No new regularities or patterns emerged. Member checking and category testing were then done to substantiate the regularities identified in previous interviews (Punch, 2009).
4.5 DATA GATHERING, ANALYSIS, RECORDING AND STORAGE

Grounded theory methods of data gathering and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) were used in the study. These methods are consistent with the interpretivist approach. The theoretical ideas generated were grounded in the systematically gathered and analysed data from the empirical world (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986; Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 2008). Also, in accordance with the grounded theory approach to the analyses process, data gathering and analysis took place concurrently (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The first stage involved the gathering of the data, sorting it and placing it into categories. Data were constantly subjected to questioning and compared for similarities and differences.

Qualitative methods of data gathering and analysis proposed by ‘grounded theorists’, were employed. These research methods are consistent with the symbolic interaction view of human actions (Chenitz & Swanson, 1986), offering a comprehensive and systematic framework for inductively building theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The outcome of the study was the generation of ’substantive theory’ (Glaser, 1978; Woods, 1992).

4.5.1 Data Gathering

The first research aim necessitated the interpretation of historical background and development of HBL support organisations in WA. This was undertaken largely by using documents produced by these organisations. They included archived and contemporary documents from HBLN. This data were supplemented by interviews with the leaders. The second and third research aims were investigated by means of semi-structured, in-depth, individual interviews. Using different methods and data types in a single project helped to establish the trustworthiness of the study.
4.5.1.1 Document Study

A major source of data is historical and contemporary documents. Documents are a rich source of data for social research and can provide the required conceptual density (Punch, 2005). The particular documents analysed included the constitutions, minutes of meetings, magazines, newsletters and advertisements of HBL support groups in WA. These were in the form of paper copies and electronic documents. The content found on the organisations’ websites was also included in the document study. The data from the document study were compared with the patterns emerging from the interview data.

4.5.1.2 Interviews

The second source of data was semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted face-to-face on a one-to-one basis with the leaders of HBL support groups. In-depth interviews are deemed to be the best strategy to gather information from individuals regarding ‘individual lived experience’ (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). They also allow the researcher to gather detailed information about participants’ perspectives. They have the advantage of allowing the participants the opportunity to express their ideas using their own words, instead of having to fit their thoughts and understandings into pre-set categories determined by the researcher (Patton, 2002). The approach has the additional advantage that the researcher retains a measure of control over the direction of the interview. This was important in making the interviews productive while limiting the time taken from the participants, and keeping the data collation within manageable limits.

The purpose of the interviews was to discover the functions and concerns of HBL support groups in WA. Patton (2002), and Cohen and Manion (2003) give detailed information on interviewing techniques. These informed the conducting of the interviews used as data gathering approach in the study.
The interviews took place at a location convenient for participant, and were conducted over a twelve month period, commencing at the beginning of 2014. Twelve interviews were conducted. The average duration of the interviews was about one hour. A semi-structured interview guide or aide-memoire was developed directly from the study’s guiding questions and used during the interviews. As the study progressed, the aide-memoire developed further and some of the existing guiding questions were modified, some were rejected, and new ones suggested themselves. Interviews were sound recorded with each participant’s consent. The recordings were transcribed for coding and analysis. This process assisted in ensuring trustworthiness. After the analysis of interviews, some of the interviewees were contacted by telephone or e-mail to verify data and to enable the researcher to gather additional data about the concepts which were generated from the analysis of the transcripts of earlier interviews. In this way, telephone interviewing was a productive supplementary data-gathering strategy.

The approach to the interviews changed as the research progressed. In the initial phase of the interviewing process, open-ended questions were used to prevent directing or influencing the data that was generated. In later phases, the interviews became more directed as informational categories were generated and saturation was achieved. The last interviews were used to gather additional data about the concepts that were generated from the analysis of previous interviews, and to involve the leaders in a process of testing and verifying the data. During the last interviews with the leaders, the latter were encouraged to critically analyse the full range of conceptual relationships which had been developed as components of the emerging theory. This strategy has been deemed by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 314) to be “the most crucial technique for establishing the credibility” of qualitative studies.

Twelve interviews in total were conducted with leaders of HBL support organisations. Without exception, the leaders were co-operative and positively disposed to the
informal interview process. In most cases they were eager to give their views about the functions of the HBL support organisation they represented. They also openly discussed their concerns regarding HBL support and the needs of the HBL community.

Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours and were conducted in a variety of settings. As the leaders of HBL support groups were all but one, active home-educating parents, the interviews had to take place at a time and place convenient for them. Most interviews were conducted during or after the HBL support group met at the venue where the group get together. Some interviews were conducted at the home of the HBL support-group leader while the children were busy with their learning activities. Most interviewees preferred to be interviewed at a public venue. All but one of the interviewees were female.

4.5.2 Data Analysis

Grounded theory methods of data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1994) were used. Qualitative research creates a substantial body of data that needs to be organised, analysed (reduced, displayed, conclusions drawn and verified) and reported. Grounded theory methods of data analysis are described in various works (Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; O’Donoghue, 2007; Punch, 2009; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The particular grounded theory methods used in the present study are termed open coding and analytic induction. These are consistent with symbolic interactionism.

The use of grounded theory methods involves an intricate process of reducing raw data to concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). These are then developed into categories and related sub-categories to help to generate theory. This, in turn, involves the use of explicit coding and analytic procedures which are designed to equip the researcher to generate theory that is integrated, consistent, plausible, and close to the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1968).
In the study, the open coding process was used to sort the raw data and place it in conceptual categories. Open coding commenced after the first interview had been transcribed. Open coding is the process of “breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data in order that concepts drawn from data are identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 195). Concepts are defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 61) as “conceptual labels placed on discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena”. The concepts were grouped together under a higher order, more abstract concept called a category. As the research progressed, the definitive properties of each category were generated. As the categories were continuously refined, the properties of each category were made more explicit and the relationships between them were made more evident. Overall, categories, themes and patterns were generated. In vivo codes, identified and articulated by the respondents, were used for some categories.

Throughout the coding process two basic analytic procedures were used: asking questions of emerging categories of data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and making comparisons between the data, concepts and categories (Glaser, 1978; Merriam, 2009). These two procedures helped to give precision and specificity to the generated concepts. Code notes and memos were also prepared to represent the questions asked of the data and the comparisons and relationships between the concepts and categories generated.

To refine the categories, new data were gathered through subsequent interviews with new participants. After each interview was transcribed and analysed, the data were used to inform and develop the categories generated in previous interviews. A stage was reached in this inductive process where connections between the categories of data identified in the open coding were recognised. In this continuous process of sampling, interviewing and data analyses, emerging understandings were tested and alternative understandings searched for. This cyclic process continued until theoretical saturation
occurred, and no new dimensions or properties could be generated to develop categories.

As the data were integrated, a set of categories that defined the functions and concerns of HBL support-group leaders became evident. Also, as major categories were generated, the possibilities for generating other categories decreased. The last data collected were specifically directed to gain closure.

Many original categories became incorporated into other categories. This resulted in the reduction of categories. The categories were taken back to the participants for “member checking” (Merriam, 2009, p. 217) and category testing. From the analysed data, conceptual frameworks or local theory were developed to provide a structured way to talk about the topic. This substantive theory was made explicit and is reported in the thesis.

Following the use of ‘open-coding’ data were further analysed using ‘analytical induction’. This has been described by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995, p. 234). It involves the formulation of propositions in a systematic way.

Through following the iterative process of grounded theory data collection and analysis, substantive theory was generated that addresses the central aims of the study. Understandings were developed about the background to HBL support groups in WA, their functions, and issues of concern for them. These understandings are made explicit and reported on later in this thesis.

4.5.3 Data Recording and Storage

Since the reported study aimed to generate theory, the labelling of concepts and the creation of categories were complex processes which required an orderly and efficient system of data coding, storage and retrieval (Corbin, 1986). The interviews were
recorded and the recordings were transcribed, coded and filed in a locked cabinet. Data from documentary sources were also coded and filed. Data were stored in hard copy and electronic formats. Backup copies were made of all electronic data. Code notes and memos were referenced and filed in such a way that they can easily be retrieved for coding and theory development. The coding of the transcripts and the systematic storage of data enabled the efficient analysis of the data to be undertaken, as well as ensure that all categories, themes and sub-themes could be traced back to the data. A systematically maintained documentation system, or ‘audit trail’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was developed through which all the data associated with the study can be readily accessible and available for others to check or use in future research. The sound records, transcripts, research notes and analysed data will be stored under lock for the period prescribed by the UWA Ethics Committee.

4.6 ADAPTING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE THREE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study reported in this thesis focused on three closely interrelated aspects of HBL support organisations in WA: historical background, functions, and issues of concern for HBL support-organisation leaders at the time of data collection in 2014. The following research questions were the links between the interpretive paradigm and the grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis.

As the study was exploratory, it was not possible from the outset to determine the total number of subordinate research questions needed to guide the research with regard to each of the three research questions. However, some guiding research questions were developed from each research question. These are set out in Table 4.1, Table 4.2 and Table 4.3 below: These guiding questions were not specific questions, but were those
questions that suggested themselves at the commencement of the study as having the greatest potential to generating data relevant to the central area of interest.

Based on the guiding questions, an aide-memoire (Burgess, 1984; O'Donoghue, 2007) was developed which consisted of a set of more specific questions for each guiding question. These questions were used to initiate ‘conversation’ as the starting point in exploring the phenomenon. The aide-memoire guided the interview and also promoted some consistency in each interview. As unexpected issues emerged, new questions were formulated and pursued. The interviews were more of a ‘conversation’ than a series of questions and answers.

4.6.1 The First Research Question

- *What is the historical background to the HBL support groups, and specifically the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) in WA?*

The first research question focused on developing an understanding of the historical background to the support of home-based learners in WA and the development of HBLN. Documents from HBLN and other HBL support groups were used to inform this aspect of the research on home-based support groups in WA.

As the first research question was historical in nature, data were primarily identified through a review of a wide range of archived and contemporary documents. These documents included constitutions, minutes of committee meeting, reports on activities and newsletters. The documents pertaining to HBLN were obtained from the HBLN archives held at the HBLN president’s home and at the State Library of WA, as well as from the HBLN internet website. Data were also gathered from websites of organisations supporting the HBL community in WA.
While the first research question was primarily addressed through document analysis, subsequent interviews with HBL support-group leaders were also drawn upon. These data-gathering techniques provided the researcher with an in-depth understanding of the background to the place of HBL support organisations in WA. The guiding questions regarding the first research question are set out in Table 4.1 below:

Table 4.1: Guiding questions for first central research question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Research Question</th>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the historical background to the current HBL support groups, and specifically HBLN in WA?</td>
<td>1.1 In what circumstances did the need for HBL support groups arise in WA?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Under what conditions have HBL support groups operated in WA?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.3 What are the continuities perceived over the years since the formation of HBL support groups until recent years?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.4 What are the changes that took place within HBL support groups since their formation to recent years?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5 When and why did changes occur within HBL support groups since their formation to recent years?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.6 What are the perceived advantages and disadvantages of HBL support groups since their formation to recent years?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total body of written data consulted was analysed systematically and logically by the researcher using grounded theory methods described earlier in this chapter. In particular, general ideas, themes and concepts were sought and used as the basis of making generalisations. The outcome of this analysis is presented later in Chapter Five.
4.6.2 The Second Research Question

- *What are the functions of the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) in WA?*

The second research question of the reported study aimed to develop an understanding of the functions of HBLN in supporting the HBL community in WA. It is important to note that the term ‘functions’ refers to all activities that the HBL support groups undertake, regardless of whether or not they are officially assigned to them. Accordingly, in pursuing the question, the researcher aimed to also uncover actions the HBL support groups assigned to themselves. In addition, it was recognised that circumstances might have changed such that tasks originally required of them were no longer performed.

In addressing the second research question, an examination and interpretation of a wide range of archived and contemporary documents were conducted, along with a series of semi-structured individual interviews with HBL support-group leaders. The guiding questions regarding the second research question are set out in Table 4.2.
Table 4.2: Guiding questions for second central research question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Research Question</th>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the functions of HBLN in WA?</td>
<td>2.1 What are the actual duties of HBL support groups in WA in meeting the diverse needs of the HBL community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2 What are the actual tasks carried out by the HBL support groups in WA in meeting the diverse needs of the HBL community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.3 What systems and procedures have been established to deal with HBL support group duties?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.4 When and why did changes occur within the HBL support groups, and what influenced these changes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.5 What are the advantages and disadvantages of HBL support groups for the members of the HBL community as perceived by their leaders?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, using grounded theory methods, the researcher systematically and logically analysed the total body of examined written documents and records obtained in the course of the research, and the interview transcripts. In doing this, the aim was to interpret how those HBL support groups participating in the study, interpreted the functions they were carrying out in supporting the HBL community in WA.

The open coding process was used to sort the raw data and place it in conceptual categories. The interview transcripts were coded. In particular, general ideas, themes, or concepts were sought as analytical tools for further analysis. The outcome of this analysis is presented later in Chapter Five.

4.6.3 The Third Research Question

- *What are the issues of concern for HBL support groups in WA, with particular reference to the largest of these groups, namely, the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN)?*
This research question focused on developing an understanding of the issues of concern for HBL support groups in WA, with particular reference to by far the largest of these groups, namely, HBLN. In this context ‘issues of concern’ were considered to be matters that affect individuals in their everyday working lives; they are matters that occupy an individual’s interest and attention because they are important to them.

In addressing this third research question, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with the leaders of HBLN and other HBL support groups in WA. Guiding questions regarding participants concerns and issues were generated through a variety of means. Consistent with the commitment to the interpretivist paradigm, equating ‘issues of concern’ with participants’ perspectives on the HBL support groups with which they were associated, was adopted. According to Blackledge and Hunt (1985), a ‘perspective’ consists of the participants’ aims or intentions, their strategies, what they see as being significant to them and what they see as the expected outcomes of their activity. These component parts of perspectives were used to develop research guiding questions from the third central research question. The guiding questions are listed in the Table 4.3 (overleaf).

Using grounded theory methods of open coding, the researcher systematically and logically revisited and re-analysed the transcripts of the interviews with reference to the third research question. The purpose of this analysis was to understand the issues of concern to HBL support-group leaders in WA in supporting the local HBL community. Again, grounded theory methods were used to generate ideas, concepts, themes and categories. The outcome of this approach to analysis is presented later in Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine.
Table 4.3: Guiding questions for third central research question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Research Question</th>
<th>Guiding Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the issues of concern for HBL support groups in WA, with particular reference to the largest of these groups, namely, HBLN?</td>
<td>3.1 What are the aims of HBL support-group leaders when performing their functions? What reasons do they give for having these aims? What challenges do they face in trying to realise these aims?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.2 What strategies do the leaders of HBLN say they use or propose to realise their aims? What reasons do they give for adopting these strategies? What challenges do they face in adopting these strategies?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.3 What significance do the participants attach to their aims and strategies? What reasons do they give for their position on this? What challenges do they face in trying to maintain this position?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.4 What outcomes do the participants expect from pursuing their aims and strategies? What reasons can they give for expecting these outcomes? What challenges do they face in trying to realise them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5 What is the nature of the context within which HBL support groups function that influences them in realising their aims and which provides them with challenges?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the results in relation to the second and third research question are written in the present tense, it relates to the period at which the data were collected and analysed, namely during 2014.

4.7 QUALITY OF DATA

Given that this was an interpretivist study in the symbolic interaction tradition, the criteria of the interpretivist were used to evaluate the study in terms of trustworthiness, rather than the more positivist criteria of validity, reliability, objectivity and generalizability. Trustworthiness refers to the believability of a researcher’s findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The trustworthiness criteria for a qualitative study, are credibility, dependability, conformability, transferability and authenticity (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen,
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; O’Donoghue, 2007; Toma, 2006). Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the data and is enhanced when research activities are used that make it more likely that ‘credible findings and interpretations will be produced’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 301). Dependability refers to the criterion of rigour related to the consistency of the findings. Transferability refers to how applicable the generated theory is in different contexts. Conformability refers to the extent to which the data and interpretations of the study are grounded in events rather than the inquirer’s personal constructions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These criteria are concerned with the extent to which confidence can be placed in the outcome of the study and the extent to which the research report can be believed (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, various procedures, as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), were followed. Through member checking, data and interpretations were shared with the participants. Also, the researcher engaged in ‘reflexivity’ by keeping a detailed reflexive journal and consulting with knowledgeable peers throughout the study. The trustworthiness of the results was ensured by using ‘thick description’, searching for contradicting evidence, alternative explanations and negative cases (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Although the researcher was a homeschool parent herself, she tried to identify other homeschool parents and people knowledgeable in the homeschool field to act as critical resources in the ‘testing’ of the aide-memoire and in the interpretation of emerging findings. The researcher’s ‘closeness to the people’ and the phenomenon (HBL in WA) provided subjective understandings that greatly increased the quality of the qualitative data (Toma, 2000). Also, she was able to establish rapport and build trusting relations with the participants and overcome barriers that might otherwise have existed. On this,
Marshall and Rossman (2011) explained that in studies of particular groups, being ‘an insider’ can help the researcher to be perceived as non-threatening.

4.8 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study reported in this thesis is the first research project to have had HBL support groups in WA and HBLN in WA as foci. The study provides understandings and generated theory in an area where no such understandings and theory previously existed. Thus, it contributes to the knowledge base of the HBL field in WA. These understandings have relevance for HBL families, those supporting home-based learners, and educational leaders in WA. Also, the generated theory will enable HBLN as an organisation, HBL families in WA, other HBL organisations, school authorities and the State education agencies, to better understand and communicate about the HBL phenomenon.

4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical issues are always involved in research with people, and these should be considered at all stages of a project (Punch, 2009). This research project complied with ethical research practices grounded in the moral principles of respect for persons (respect their privacy, anonymity and right to participate), beneficence (ensure that participants are not harmed by participating), and justice (who benefits from the study, and who does not) (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

The ethical guidelines of The University of Western Australia (UWA) were followed in the research. The proposal for the study was approved by The University of Western Australia’s Human Research Ethics Committee prior to the commencement of the project. Throughout the course of the study, efforts were made to maintain the basic ethical principles in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research
Council’s (NHMRC) *National Statement of Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (Australian Government, 2007 - updated February 2013), which governs the University of Western Australia’s Human Research Ethics Committee. The protocols of confidentiality, informed consent and risk were followed to ensure that the participants were treated ethically at all times.

The researcher’s main concern in reporting the study was to preserve privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. HBL families and organisations supporting them, can be sensitive to their image in the general and institutionalised education community. For this reason, the researcher took care not to expose them. At all time, all participants, including HBL leaders outside HBLN, were treated with respect. Ethical principles were resolutely implemented to take care that the participants were not jeopardised in any way.

All data has been treated confidentially as per standard ethics protocols for the treatment and storage of data. In order to further preserve anonymity of the study participants, all information collected was coded and at all times remains the property of the researcher.

**4.10 CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented the research design and methodology of the study reported in this thesis. The central aim of the study was to generate theory about the background to HBL support groups in WA, their functions, and issues of concern for them. First, the central research questions were given. Secondly, the nature of the theoretical framework was outlined and the case for the selection of grounded theory methodology was made. The nature of the interpretivist paradigm, the associated theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism, and the grounded theory position that underpins the study, were outlined. Thirdly, the study population and the selection of study participants were presented. Fourthly, the methods of data gathering, analysis, recording and storage used
in the study were presented. Fifthly, the manner in which the theoretical framework was applied in relation to each of the three research questions was outlined. Sixthly, the provisions that were made to ensure the trustworthiness of the data were explained. A brief explanation of the significance of the study followed. The chapter concludes with a brief review of the ethical issues that were considered in conducting the study. The next chapter, Chapter Five, will now present the understandings generated in relation to the first and second research questions.

The results of the three research questions are presented in the next five chapters. In relation to the results of research questions two and three, while the study is written in the present tense, it relates to the period at which the data were collected and analysed, namely, the end of 2014.
CHAPTER 5
BACKGROUND AND FUNCTIONS OF HBLN AS THE MAIN HBL SUPPORT ORGANISATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Home-based learning (HBL) is an alternative form of education where parents or guardians take responsibility for the education of their children of compulsory school-age outside of the conventional school system. A vast array of international, national and local HBL support organisations address the diverse needs of the associated growing HBL community.

The HBL community in Western Australia (WA) can gain access to a wide range of support. Associated organisations include virtual groups, national curriculum providers and international organisations promoting a specific HBL approach. There are also specific organisations based in WA that give support to specific groupings within the HBL community in the State. These include groups supporting homeschoolers in a specific geographic area, those following a specific educational approach, those of a particular or religious persuasion, or those offering a specific service.

The Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) of WA is the only State-wide HBL support organisation that supports the entire HBL community in WA. It was the focus of the study reported in this thesis.

The overview of the literature related to HBL and HBL support groups presented in Chapter Three indicated that few studies have focused on HBL support groups. In particular, no research investigated the historical background to HBL support organisations in Australia, and more specifically in WA. To address this situation, the first two research questions of the present study were posed, namely, ‘What is the
historical background to the HBL support groups, and specifically HBLN in WA?’ and ‘What are the functions of HBLN in WA?’

This chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part describes the historical background to HBLN from its formation to the time the study was conducted in 2014. It was informed by a document analysis of archived and contemporary publications of HBLN. The second part of the chapter focuses on the functions of HBLN as perceived by HBL support-organisation leaders in WA. Analyses of a wide range of archived and contemporary documents, along with a series of semi-structured individual interviews, were used to inform this part of the chapter.

5.2 BACKGROUND TO THE HBL NETWORK OF WA

Parents have always been free to home educate their children in WA. Two early Education Acts in WA indicated that children were educated at home. The Elementary Act 1871 implied that parents were responsible for and capable of providing education for their children at home, while the Education Act 1928 viewed regulating home education as redundant (Reilly, 2007, p. 63). However, up to the 1980s home education was seen as a ‘last-resort’ form of education for families in geographically isolated or physically-at-risk contexts (Harding, 2008).

Since the beginning of 1980 a widespread concern over institutional education developed internationally and also in WA (Reilly, 2007). This concern led to a withdrawal of children from State schools. Many families, representing a vast spectrum of philosophies, but who had a common “concern and commitment to the guidance, nurturing and education of their children” (Reilly, 2007, p. 64), decided to home school their children. Hunter (1994) also explains that the re-emergence of homeschooling in the 1980s was motivated by parental rights being a priority over government rules, a
desire to maintain the family unit for as long as possible, and a fear that children could be mentally, physically or spiritually harmed within government-sponsored or supervised school environments.

Evidence exists of families living in WA towns and in the Perth metropolis, homeschooling during the 1980s. For example, Liz Sugars and a group of dedicated parents started the Rockingham Family School in her small house in Safety Bay in February 1985. This family school later developed into the Rockingham Montessori School (Rockingham Montessori School, 2014).

5.2.1 First Years of the Network

The first meeting of the group that would soon developed into HBLN, took place on 12 July 1990 at a home in Mullaloo, Perth. The meeting was attended by twelve families who either already homeschooled, or were interested in educating, their children at home. The meeting was led by Liz Sugars who ran her own ‘family school’ at that stage. She reminded the parents of their responsibility to keep control over their children’s education. The aims of the first meeting was for families interested in homeschooling to get to know each other, to share their own experiences and ideas, and to give support and encouragement to each other. At this meeting the ideas of a newsletter for homeschoolers and a support network of interested people were born. The concept of the network was copied from well-established groups in the eastern States of Australia and in the USA. The first meeting was followed by a group visit to the home of a family already homeschooling in Safety Bay, Rockingham, south of Perth.

The Network quickly grew as, in the words of the then newsletter editor, “the concept of homeschooling as a viable educational alternative is awakening parents in Perth”. Homeschoolers from country areas and from the Perth metropolitan area joined the network. The function of the Network was seen as being the provision of an active local
network for support, curriculum resources and ideas, and for the children's social needs. The Network provided the opportunity for the members to learn from each other, while at the same time remain faithful to their own philosophy. On this, the editor of the March 1991 newsletter wrote: “Sometimes it is helpful to know how to put our theories into practice, and this is where friendship and sharing with other Home Learners can be a great benefit, not to mention the encouragement we all gain from each other.” The first year of the Network provided an opportunity to “share many pleasant hours together discussing ideas, sharing ideas and problems and also discovering a lot of similarities in our life styles”, but also had to “banded together to get a job done”.

At the time of the Network’s inception the Education Department in WA drafted a new policy on home schooling. The newly-formed group wrote to the Department to introduce the group and to request information about the upcoming policy. All the members were also encouraged to write individually to the Departmental Committee drafting the new policy. A copy of the Draft Requirements for Home Tuition Providers was received at the beginning of November 1990. After studying the document, the group and some individual members responded with comments or queries. A group of country homeschoolers also submitted a statement opposing the draft on a number of issues.

In anticipation that their attempt to have the policy simplified would be unsuccessful, homeschoolers got together on two consecutive weekends at the end of 1990 to come up with a workable and standard ‘application for exemption’ and ‘courses of instruction’ based on Education Department curricula guidelines that could be given to the Department. The plan was to word their submission in such a way as to stress that freedom in teaching method, content and evaluation is basic to effective home-based education. Both teacher and non-teacher parents were invited to attend the meetings and
all members were urged to act immediately in order to help put together the paperwork that might help many to deal with the State bureaucracy. A document was put together and was sent to the then Minister of Education, Dr. Geoff Gallop.

At the end of 1990 the Network leaders perceived the Ministry as approachable and having a positive attitude towards HBLN and the HBL community. In an article in the December newsletters of 1990 a leader wrote: “It is wonderful to think that we are able to start off on the right footing with the authorities. Let’s hope and pray that the new legislation will fully accommodate the needs of all West Australian home-learning families”.

From the beginning of 1991, homeschoolers were required to register with the Department of Education. The first home visits by representatives of the Department took place early in that year. Some homeschooling families experienced frustration in getting ‘approval’ to home educate their children. HBLN was doing its best to work out how to have, as described in the June 1991 newsletter,

"a peaceful co-existence with the Ministry, and hopefully, by sharing our experiences they will be able to put together some guidelines for home visits, in a simple format which will make it easy for homeschoolers and acceptable to the Ministry Public Servants."

At that stage the Network purchased curriculum material from the Ministry of Education Bookshop and this was made available for all members to view.

There were two motivations to start a State-wide HBL support organisation in WA. The first motivation was to create a State-wide network of resources and support serving HBL families in the State. Secondly, the HBL community needed a forum to discuss possible changes in laws affecting the HBL community and to liaise with the educational authorities as representative of the entire HBL community.
5.2.2 Home-Based Learning Network

The Network was officially called ‘Home-Based Learning Network of WA’ since the two weekend meetings at the end of 1990 and used the name in their correspondence with the Department of Education. The abbreviation ‘HBLN’ was first used in the February 1991 newsletter. At that time HBLN described themselves as “a register of families who are homeschooling or interested in homeschooling”. A register was kept of members so that people with the same interests, or living within the same vicinity, could be put in touch with the idea that they could help and support each other if needed. This was done in three ways, namely, through monthly meetings, small support groups and regular newsletters.

HBLN organised monthly meetings, usually in the form of a picnic in a public place. These public meetings served two functions. First, homeschooling families could get to know each other. Secondly, it provided an opportunity for members of the public interested in homeschooling to come and discuss the topic with HBLN leaders. Members of HBLN formed small support groups scattered throughout the State where people who lived near to each other or who had similar philosophies of education got together. These small groups were not all open to the general public.

The first HBLN newsletter was mailed out after the first meeting, and monthly thereafter. The Newsletter was originally sent to every family listed on the register. However, due to the cost of photocopying and postage, by the second half of 1991 it was only sent to members who paid an annual subscription of $10. The HBLN newsletter was considered to be for everyone and all members were encouraged to contribute to it in whatever way they chose as long as the submissions were edifying to the group. The contributions included book reviews, advertisements of upcoming events, educational articles, and copies of media reports related to home-education.
Initially, there was a great debate on terminology. The families referred to themselves as ‘Home Learning Families’ providing ‘home tuition’. It was suggested that it might be better to call home schooling ‘private tutoring’, because home schooling was seen to ‘raise eyebrows’ when mentioned in casual conversation, while the term ‘private tutoring’ was considered to have ‘a more respectable air’ to it as well as being considered a better description of practice.

5.2.3 Incorporation

Since the second half of 1991, members suggested that HBLN should become an incorporated body in order to function in a formal way as a group. Up to then, HBLN had functioned as a friendship group with no assigned responsibilities or duties. As different people had different interests and abilities, they all shared informally and benefited from the Network. This had worked well while the numbers involved in the group were small, but as the number of people choosing to educate their children at home increased dramatically in the early 1990s, a formal structure was needed. A newsletter article stated that community interest and sharing of information and resources grew by 300% from 1993 to 1994. As a corporation HBLN would be an association of individuals created by law and existing as an entity with powers and liabilities independent of its members.

Incorporation held various advantages. First, in order to be effective in influencing how government reacts to the increasing numbers of families choosing to home-educate, it was seen that it would be helpful for HBLN to be recognised as an organised group with significant support among homeschoolers in WA. As an incorporated group, HBLN expected that the WA Education Department would inform all new homeschoolers of the group’s existence and provide contact phone numbers. Establishing contact between potential homeschoolers and HBLN would ensure that they receive correct information.
from Education Department District Offices regarding procedures and legal requirements. It would also ensure that new homeschoolers, especially in the country areas, could find out about homeschool groups in their local area. Further, the existence of HBLN Inc would mean that the responsibility of helping new homeschooling families getting started could be shared in an orderly way, rather than be carried by two or three individuals. Another advantage, it was held, was that once incorporated, HBLN could use the services of Meerilinga and tap into other voluntary community groups that are associated with them; Meerilinga is a charitable, non-profit organisation which seeks to advance the dignity and well-being of young children.

Incorporation was also seen to have insurance advantages. As it stood, individuals in HBLN could be liable for claims of damage or slander. With incorporation, the possibility of individuals being sued would be lessened. Becoming an incorporated group would also offer protection to members from misrepresentation by non-members. If homeschoolers claiming to speak for HBLN in an open forum but put forward their own views as those of the members, it would be possible to check their authenticity.

Becoming an incorporated group would in no way take authority or responsibility away from parents and families who home educated. In fact it would give them more opportunity to participate in the community via the social structures and networks already in place. There would be also no compulsion for current HBLN members or newsletter subscribers to join the incorporated HBLN. However, all WA homeschoolers were invited to seriously consider joining for the mutual benefit of each other, and to ensure continued growth and more efficient and varied networking.

After much discussion and canvassing of opinions, it was generally agreed that incorporation was essential. However, it was also agreed that the group would maintain its friendliness and informality. In the newsletters they referred to the then Nursing
Mothers Association that succeeded in becoming incorporated while still maintaining friendly, open relationships with the whole community.

Becoming an incorporated body involved a lot of work. A constitution had to be drawn up and funds had to be raised to cover legal costs. The then leaders of HBLN came to the realisation that HBLN needed to establish a committee responsible for this task. The Draft Constitution of HBLN Inc was available in June 1994. All HBLN families were asked to donate $5 to help cover the cost of incorporation, so that the newsletter subscription money was not used for this purpose. An advertisement was placed in *The West Australian* on 25 July 1994 announcing the forthcoming incorporation. One month later the constitution was lodged with the Department of Corporate Affairs. November 1994 was used to establish job descriptions for committee positions and all members could nominate for them. The Inaugural Annual General Meeting of HBLN was held on Saturday 21st of January 1995 at Perth College, Mt. Lawley and was attended by a large number of homeschoolers. At this meeting office bearers were chosen.

The first newsletter after incorporation came out in February 1995. While the newsletter was to be the organ of HBLN Inc, it was not necessary to be a member to receive it. Likewise with excursions and meetings, anyone interested in home education was welcomed to attend and was given assistance where possible.

At that stage, HBLN Inc acknowledged that the organisation would never be the only group representing homeschoolers in WA, because there were already other groups of homeschoolers who shared a faith or philosophy in common, or who lived in the same area. These groups, or individual members of these groups, were welcomed to be involved with HBLN Inc. The personal advantages of being a member of HBLN Inc was held by the leaders as that of having a voice in the wider community through group membership, being able to influence the group’s direction through voting privileges,
and getting discounts on HBLN Inc. excursions and publications. It was considered that HBLN Inc would be able to serve all members well if they would continue to see one another as friends, and maintain open communication and trust.

There is no indication regarding how many HBL families were HBLN members at the time the group became incorporated. However, according to the December 1994 newsletter, Peter Frizzell, the then Executive Director of Schools of the Department of Education estimated that at that stage there were 400 families undertaking home tuition in WA compared to the 340 000 students in government and non-government schools in WA.

5.2.4 The WA Department of Education

During the beginning years of HBLN, many members of the homeschool community had contact, and developed relationships, with members of the WA Department of Education. According to the February 1992 newsletter, they also corresponded with the Shadow Minister for Education regarding ideal home-schooling legislation and the concerns of HBLN in this area.

In the early 1990s, homeschoolers experienced that the Department wanted to discourage them. Some documents quoted families being insistently told that “it is VERY hard to be approved (register)”. HBLN acknowledged that the various districts were extremely busy and short staffed and that officials of the Department would prefer to have no homeschoolers to deal with. Members, however, were encouraged to persist in getting their registration. In a 1992 newsletter, it was held that “once they know that you are serious, most contact that follows seems to be brief and fairly positive”.

The attitude of HBLN toward the Department of Education during these early years is illustrated by the following excerpt of advice in a newsletter of 1992:
The job of the Ministry is to ensure that every school aged child is receiving regular and efficient instruction, because that is the law. We must accept the law, until we can change it to suit ourselves, and it seems we have to ‘co-operate’ with our Area Superintendent if we are to have a peaceful existence in this State.

If we can make suggestions which will help them to know that our children are receiving an education, then they may come up with a policy which will be more suitable and less confusing for all involved. If we remember that they know little about the wonderful advantages of alternative education, then we can’t really expect them to know how good Home Tuition is unless we take the time to tell them. Their main focus is on the Government Education System, and we are a unique minority group, and they really don’t know how to handle what they believe is their responsibility toward our children.

Nevertheless, according to various newsletters, there were situations where members felt as if they were no more than ‘a nuisance, creating extra work for Department personnel.’

The HBLN members met and wrote to personnel in the Department of Education on a regular basis regarding its proposed home-education policy. In 1992 HBLN received several signed petitions about the proposed policy. A conference hosted by a regional education officer (the Bunbury Education Officer) and two experienced homeschoolers also addressed the policy. HBLN objected to the proposed policy because the document was drafted without ‘input’ from home educators or home-education groups within WA. They believed that the policy required far more than the “regular and efficient instruction” referred to in the Education Act. They raised their objection to the policy and requested further discussion on the topic.

HBLN continued to contact the Department of Education regarding the homeschooling situation in WA and a meeting took place on 13th March 1997. In order to keep up contact with the Department, HBLN asked for members with good relationship with their District Education Office to consider being HBLN contact persons for their District.
By the time of the study being reported here was conducted, the School Education Act 1999 had granted parents educational choices. Instead of sending their school-aged children to a school, parents could register as home educators with the Chief Executive Officer at the local Department of Education office (Department of Education, 2012a).

5.2.5 Functioning of HBLN

According to their website (HBLN, 2012b), HBLN is a non-political organisation that supports the HBL community in Perth and regional WA by providing human and material resources, social contact and information. Paid membership gives access to regular workshops and seminars, the quarterly published magazine, Learning Matters, and voting rights. HBLN also acts as an advocate for HBL within the wider community and strives to build local support groups. It also supports HBL families and smaller HBL groups. It is run by a committee of active home-educating parents volunteering their time and expertise.

5.2.5.1 Organisational Structure and Committee

Before incorporation, the network was run in a very informal way. In the documents from that time which had been analysed, three positions were mentioned, namely the editor of the newsletter, the network coordinator whose role was to keep a list of names, addresses, and interests of registered home-learning families, and a clipping keeper whose responsibility was to collect news items which may be of interest to home learners for publication in the newsletter. By 1992 the leaders of HBLN also formed a planning committee to organise workshops, excursions, and specialist seminars.

Since incorporation, HBLN has been run by a committee of active home-educating parents, volunteering their time and expertise. The committee started off as a very
informal committee but underwent major changes over the years. Committee members forged relationships inside and outside of the HBL community.

Positions on the committee were those of president, treasurer, secretary, editor, and additional members. Over the years the number of additional members changed as specific needs arose and volunteers became available. At some stage there were as many as thirteen persons serving on the committee. At the time the study being reported here was being conducted, only four volunteers served. As one participant put it: “It comes down to who have time to do what.” Insurance issue were at that stage considered to be the main issue that had to be dealt with and it took a lot of time.

Committee members took on different positions as needs and interests changed. For example, the person who was the longest serving member of the HBLN committee at the time the study was being conducted had joined the committee in 2005 and served as treasurer, event-organiser, president, and coordinator.

In the middle of 2014 the first paid HBLN position was created, namely that of HBLN coordinator. The position was filled by a long-standing committee member who was reaching the end of her family’s homeschooling journey and, it was considered by the other HBL leaders, was about to be lost to the HBL community in WA. It was a one-day-a-week position. At the time the study being reported here was conducted, the HBLN coordinator worked at least three days a week on HBLN activities.

The HBLN coordinator’s phone number appears on the HBLN website. She acts as contact person for the organisation. She handles telephone and website inquiries. She is the initial point of contact and provides reassurance for people who are starting their HBL journey. She also handles the administration of insurance.
Part of the coordinator’s role on the committee is to monitor changes in government policy. The person appointed as the first HBLN coordinator served ten years on the HBLN committee before being appointed as coordinator. During that time, she established good relationships with people outside of the HBL community in WA. By being on the committee for a long time, she created stability and the opportunity to maintain relationships which would be hard to maintain if committee members changed regularly.

5.2.5.2 Membership

HBLN values the privacy of its members and does not share how many members it has. Furthermore, membership is on a family basis which makes it even harder to say how many children are members of HBLN. Member families include exclusive HBL families, families with one child homeschooling, past HBL families staying involved or using resources after children have moved to regular schools or have graduated, and prospective HBL families in the State. HBLN does not keep records of whether members are registered with the WA Department of Education.

From the beginning, the organisation valued the privacy of each member. Personal details of families who attended the first meetings were not listed in minutes, although the details were made available on request at subsequent meetings with the goal of enabling parents to establish idea-sharing and support networks. Also, in writing to the Department of Education to introduce the group, no personal details were disclosed. Phone numbers of contact persons were given in newsletters, but the members had to phone to get the address of meetings.

HBLN is a very inclusive organisation. It is one of its constitutional objectives to be non-party political and non-sectarian. It does not promote one HBL practice or philosophy. When HBLN committee members liaise with the WA Education
Department or its moderators, they represent the wide HBL community. HBLN caters for children of all ages. About 25 per cent of HBLN members are country members.

5.2.5.3 Newsletter

In the initial period of the organisation, the newsletter was regarded as an essential part of the budding network in WA. It played an important role in informing members and giving them an opportunity to share their homeschooling journey with others. For example, experienced homeschoolers shared their journal entries. Educational articles and book reviews considered of value to the HBL community were published. Also, articles relevant to homeschooling which were published in local newspapers were copied and distributed to the HBL community via the newsletters.

The newsletters also featured a wide range of advertisements, including curricula for sale and upcoming events. For a small donation members could advertise goods, services, and items for sale in the newsletter. Through the newsletter, members were also made aware of competitions like the ‘Young Writers’ Contest and Poetry Competition, homeschoolers overseas looking for penfriends in Australia, and school holiday vacation programmes. The newsletter was also used to welcome new families, as well as to share such family happenings as the birth of a baby, and serious illness or death amongst member families. Achievements of children were also shared.

The editor of the HBLN newsletter invited children to make contributions to it and also to start a mini-newsletter for themselves. She helped them with photocopying and enclosed it with the main newsletter. To encourage children to be involved with the newsletter, their contributions of drawings, poems and stories contributed were regularly published.
The newsletter was published at regular intervals. Usually, it came out every month in order for the community to stay in touch and up-to-date. Sometimes, due to financial constraints, it only came out once every two months, especially from July 1991 to February 1995.

During the 2000s the newsletter developed into a substantial magazine called *Learning Matters*. A wide range of topics relevant to the HBL community were covered. For example, the January 2008 edition devoted four pages to moderators in an effort to improve the relationship between the HBL community and the WA Department of Education and Training. Three moderators from two different District Education Offices of the then Department of Education and Training contributed to the newsletter. Nine families gave an account of their varying degrees of positive and negative interaction experienced with the WA Department of Education and Training and its moderators. These families shared their initial and on-going contact with their moderators. The editor encouraged all members of the HBL community to find a way to meet the needs of their children and the demands of the State. She emphasised that this is an individual pursuit and each family needs to find its own way of doing it. In her words, “moderators are the bridge and both the home educator and the moderator need to be open, understanding and positively communicative”.

At the time the study being reported here was conducted, the HBLN newsletters were digitally available on the HBLN website and were e-mailed to members. Technological developments also influenced the content of the newsletters. Whereas in the past informative articles discovered by members, were shared via the newsletters with the wider HBL community, the current newsletters consist mostly of internet links.

During 1991, HBLN developed a Resource Booklet for parents on how to start HBL. In addition to addressing the concerns of new homeschoolers, this booklet listed
educational resources available in WA. HBLN regularly updates the information and also develops booklets on other relevant topics as the need arises.

5.2.5.4 Meetings, Camps, Seminars, Conferences and Events

At the beginning, HBLN supported the HBL community by having regular monthly meetings which also meant regular social interaction between members. Newsletters from 1990 reported that these meetings were attended by families already officially home schooling their children, families who were regularly adopting unofficial part time school attendance, and families who had children who were of school-age the following year. The conversation was about homeschool basics and moral support. Friends and interested members of the public were welcome at these meetings. They took place at private homes and ‘family schools’ across the Perth metropolitan area. Similar meetings were held in the southwest of WA. As the group grew in 1991, meetings were organised at parks to accommodate bigger groups.

In 1990, these monthly meetings were usually informal and described as ‘social gatherings’. They were usually followed by a picnic lunch provided by each family or shared. During 1991 a formal session by a nominated speaker from the group, followed by a question and answer session of 30 minutes, was introduced to accommodate newcomers. For example, at the August 1992 meeting, there was a talk on the value and availability of educational toys and resources. Monthly meetings were described as “a time of positive sharing” and a place where “we can support each other, and be positive” by the then editor of the HBLN newsletter.

Some monthly meetings were more formal and had special speakers. For example a Christian homeschooler from the USA gave a talk on the home-schooling scene in America at the monthly meeting of November 1991. This was the first meeting at which members were asked to pay a fee per family attending to cover some of the cost of the
speaker. Other monthly meetings had a special theme. For example a Christmas party was held at King’s Park in December 1992 and was described by the newsletter editor as being a great opportunity for the parents and children to have some fun together and to get to know each other a bit better as well.

In addition to the monthly meetings, regular excursions were organised for the families. Some of the places visited included a farm, air force base, national parks, observatory, Scitech, newspaper and museums. These excursions included visiting one of the parent’s place of work. Excursions were usually followed by lunch in a park close by. In the early years of the organisation, HBLN also organised camps for homeschooling families.

During the 1990s, HBLN regularly organised seminars, conferences and workshops for home-educators in Perth and in regional areas. Entire families, including grandparents, were welcome to attend. While older children could attend the meetings, child-care was arranged for younger ones. Books were available to buy. Curriculum and mathematics education workshops were also conducted, and a Sports Fun Day was initiated.

5.2.5.5 Smaller Support Groups

Many smaller HBL support groups operating independently in WA, were supported by HBLN from the beginning years. Most of these groups got their insurance through HBLN. In March 2012 there were 37 metropolitan and regional co-operatives registered under HBLN that regularly met for reasons ranging from social outings to having formal classes in Latin and logic. Some groups catered for children of all ages, while others had age requirements. Some groups catered for HBL from a specific religious or philosophical worldview. For example, the Natural Learning Hub catered for unschoolers, The Hive offered Christian community classes, and Catholic Homeschoolers Support Group supported Catholic families. Some groups got together
for sport activities, writing, art and drama classes, or surfing and filmmaking. There was a group for mums of children diagnosed with autism. Regional groups operated in Albany, Busselton, Geraldton, and the South West of WA. Most of the interpersonal groups represented in Figure 2.2 were affiliated with HBLN.

### 5.2.5.6 Characteristic of HBLN Members

HBLN members are, and always have been, mostly mothers who actively homeschool their children. In the 1990s a few fathers were involved in the development of HBL organisations, but during the time of the study being reported in this thesis, very few men were involved, either as homeschooling parents or in the organisation/management of HBL in WA.

The HBL parent-teachers lead busy lives educating their children and caring for their families. Many of them are committed and self-sacrificing, often traveling long distances to get their children to ‘right’ activities.

In the early years, all members took part in sharing responsibility for the organisation by contributing to the newsletter and organising events. They collaborated with each other and frequently asked for help. They also paid compliments and expressed gratitude to each other. After the first meeting, the newsletter editor wrote: “It was wonderful to feel part of such a group of caring and thinking parents”. Reaching the end of the first year of the organisation, she also wrote: “We should give ourselves and each other a pat on the back for all that we have achieved in our homeschooling ventures”. Again, during 1992, the then editor wrote: “It’s your insight and sensitivity to your children that have lead you to this point and these are, I believe, your greatest homeschooling assets”.

The HBL community cared for each other on more than just an educational level. For example, in 1992 the then editor of the newsletter wrote the following in reaction to the
hardship a regional homeschooling family experienced when one child had to be hospitalised for an extended period in Perth:

As a support group I think it is fine to share our tough times as well as our happy times, and I am sure that our children benefit from meeting other homeschooled children in all kinds of circumstances; so if there is anyone out there struggling let us know and we will see how the group or individuals in the group can be of assistance. As we are unique in our approach to living, sometimes the community as a whole cannot necessarily cope with the occasional unique problems we may encounter; and I am sure that even just a word of understanding could be all it takes to help someone over a hurdle at times, if that is all we have to offer, but you know it is amazing just how resourceful homeschoolers are.

By the middle of 1991, the group was more formalised. Members contribute to the newsletter and the editor only had to put everything together. They worked together and contributed what they could.

5.2.6 Further Developments

In the first 25 years of its existence, HBLN changed from being a small, all-involved group, sharing responsibility and everyone knowing each other, to a big, diverse group, looking at a relatively small committee to lead and direct them. In that time the HBL community had grown and technology had developed.

Technological and media developments also had an impact on the existence and functions of HBL support organisations, both positively and negatively. As the worldwide-web started reaching the man-in-the-street through the 1990s, online support groups aimed at the HBL community developed. Since then the number and types of online support have mushroomed. In May 2002, the HBLN YAHOO Group was founded. Members were asked to contribute to the development of a vision statement and to develop an internet policy. One of the aims of the group was to bring the city-based home-educators a little closer to the country-based home-educators. The
YAHOO-group allowed for more frequent and easier communication, particularly on legal issues of issues related to the WA Department of Education. The mailing list also provided a means of advising members of events that did not make it into the printed newsletter. During the 2000s the HBLN website was created and the HBLN Face Book page started in December 2009.

5.3 THE FUNCTIONS OF HBLN IN WA

The previous section of this chapter described the background to and history of the development of the only State-wide HBL support organisation in WA, namely HBLN. This section will now present an understanding of the functions of HBLN. The constitutional objectives of HBLN will also be presented. Together, these two sections provide the essential context to inform an understanding of the issues of concern facing HBL support-group leaders in WA.

This section focuses on the functions of HBLN at the time of data collection in 2014 as understood by the leaders of HBL support organisations in WA who participated in the study reported in this thesis.

First it is important to look at the constitutional objectives of HBLN. Very few changes occurred in the constitutional objectives of HBLN over the first 25 years of the organisation’s existence. At the time the study reported here was conducted, HBLN had four constitutional objectives, namely to:

- Provide social contact and support for all families involved in home-based education.
- Endeavour to foster closer cooperation between home-based learners and the wider community.
• Obtain or provide any rights, privileges, concessions, facilities or amenities for the educational benefit of home-based students and their families.

• Be a non-party political and non-sectarian organisation.

Successive HBLN committees can interpret and operationalise these constitutional objectives in different ways. Also, the wider HBL community develops its own perceptions of what the functions of HBLN are. Therefore the aim in the study was to go beyond what is written in the HBLN constitution and determine what HBL support-group leaders in WA understand to be the functions of HBLN.

The findings of the present study on HBLN functions have been categorised into five themes. The themes generated regarding HBLN functions were ‘official functions performed by HBLN’, ‘non-official functions performed by HBLN’, ‘unintended functions’, ‘functions that are not desired’ and ‘aspirational functions’. Each of these themes will now be discussed in turn.

5.3.1 Official Functions Performed by HBLN

The first theme generated regarding functions of HBLN that HBL support-group leaders in WA identified, are those functions they perceive as being official functions or duties. Official duties are those functions HBLN intend to fulfil within the HBL milieu in WA. These correspond with the objectives written in Version 2010 and Version 2015 of the HBLN constitution.

Within the group of official duties, fourteen sub-themes were generated. These are:

• information provision / knowledge broker in the HBL community in WA,

• organise events,

• insurance provision,
• support to smaller HBL groups,
• inclusive organisation,
• support new HBL families,
• liaise with national home-education networks,
• enable contact amongst HBL families,
• ‘mum supports’,
• acceptance of special-needs families,
• put to rest concerns of the HBL community,
• discounted resources and event entrances,
• protecting the rights of and advocating for the HBL community, and
• give voice to the HBL community.

Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed in turn.

5.3.1.1 Information Provision/Knowledge Broker in the HBL Community in WA

The first sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions’ is ‘information provision/ knowledge broker in the HBL community in WA’. HBLN is considered the main source of information for this community. The organisation collects vast amounts of information on various topics of relevance to the HBL community. This information is then made available to all HBLN members, but can also be accessed by the general public.

HBLN provides a wide range of information relevant to the HBL community in WA. For example, it makes members aware of legislation changes that may affect the HBL
community at large, or individual families. This information informs group and individual decision-making. As one of the HBLN committee members explained, “whether individuals or groups comply with the new legislation, is their own choice, as long as they are informed and make an informed decision. HBLN plays this role.”

The organisation provides a wide range of educational information. Also, they take into consideration that, as on participant explained, “home-educators do not want to read all about school, because our kids aren’t at school”. HBLN also make members aware of online educational resources.

It is held that the HBLN coordinator endeavours to ensure that all information provided is accurate and up-to-date. For this, the HBLN committee, and specifically the HBLN coordinator, stay in contact with national and international HBL support organisations, regularly liaise with the Department of Education in WA, and engage in research on issues of concern to the HBL community in WA that may arise. For example, in the early 2010s a lot of fear mongering was going around about the transition of homeschoolers to university. To put this concern to rest, HBLN committee members contacted the relevant organisations, got the actual facts, and made them known to the HBL community as well as the Department of Education.

Information is made available via different avenues. At the time the study reported here was undertaken, most of the information could be found on the HBLN website. Information was also provided through workshops, booklets and newsletters. In addition to HBLN providing written information, committee members and local contact persons provide information verbally through telephone calls or when meeting people.
**HBLN Website**

It is held that the HBLN website is an extensive information source for the HBL community. It is also seen as being a source of information about homeschooling for the general public in WA. HBLN aims to make as much information as possible available via the website. As one participant (an HBLN committee member) explained: “Our focus is to get as much as possible of our stuff on that sort of platform so that people have easy access to it”.

The HBLN website has three main target groups, namely active homeschooling parents, new homeschoolers, and members of the general public interested in homeschooling. Long-time homeschooling parents visit the website mainly to find out about HBLN events and activities, online resources, current homeschool news and developments, and member discounts. New or prospective homeschoolers find information on how to get started, curriculum choices, dealing with moderators, and contact details of local HBL support groups. The general public can get information on the website regarding the history of home-education, what is involved in home-educating your child, different learning styles, testimonials of homeschool graduates, and services available to homeschooling families.

There are many advantages to having information deemed relevant to the HBL community in WA available on a website. It can be accessed at any time of the day and from the HBL family’s home. This is especially of great value to country members. Another advantage of having the information on the website, it is held, is that the information will still be available to the HBL community if HBLN, for whatever reason, cannot continue running workshops.

The website, it is held, is frequently updated to ensure that the information is relevant and up-to-date. During the time the study reported here was conducted, the format of the
website was updated and new information was put on the website, including information regarding the transition from homeschooling to university.

**Workshops**

Information is also disseminated to the HBL community and prospective homeschoolers through HBLN workshops. At the time of the study reported here was conducted, three workshops were being run at regular intervals, namely ‘Getting started’, ‘Moderators Reporting and the WA Curriculum’ and ‘Learning Preferences’. The HBLN committee members indicated that workshops on other relevant topics would be developed if requested.

**Booklets**

Information is also distributed through HBLN-developed booklets. These are based on the information provided in the workshops. At the time the study reported in this thesis was being conducted, three booklets were available for sale. The first, *Getting Started with Home Education*, explains everything a new home-educator needs to know about home-education in WA. The second, *Moderators, Reporting and the WA Curriculum*, is a guide to home-educators regarding what to expect from moderator visits. The target group for this booklet is home-educators who want to find out about the new WA Curriculum, about what they need to do to comply with its requirements, and about their rights and responsibilities. The third booklet, *Learning Preferences Booklet*, is a guide to discovering children’s learning preferences. It is claimed that understanding a child’s learning preference profile can be key to workable family dynamics and optimised learning for the child. The booklet explores how HBL parents can help their child to “sparkle, shine and be their best in learning and life!” (HBLN, 2014).
**Newsletter/Magazine**

The HBLN newsletter was the main information source for home-educators in WA before the HBLN website was developed in the early 2000s. Because the newsletters are sent to all members, it is still regarded as an important information source for many HBL parents. These newsletters were first posted out, then e-mailed, and are now sent via social media sites to members. Since 2015 the wider HBL community can get access to the newsletters through various social media sites.

**Personal Contact**

The fifth way in which HBLN provides information about home-education, is through the telephone and personal conversations with the HBLN coordinator, other HBLN committee members, and local contact persons. People making inquiries of these persons are usually first referred to the HBLN website for information. If they have further questions they get personal clarifications via e-mail or a telephone call from the HBLN coordinator.

### 5.3.1.2 Organise Events

The second sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘organise events’. Some of the participants identified ‘organising events’ as one of the main function of HBLN. Through these events, HBLN realises two of its broad constitutional objectives, namely to provide social contact for all families involved in home-based education, and to do so within the framework of being a non-political and non-sectarian organisation. These events are characterised by social inclusivity. They also give members of the HBL community the opportunity to take part in activities in which regular school children would take part.

Although it is considered as HBLN’s function to run events, the particular events chosen depend on the needs of the HBL community. At the time the study reported here
was conducted, events organised by HBLN included sports days, ball for teens, science fair, teen café, concerts, art festival, film festival, and Adventure World day.

The number and nature of events HBLN runs, change as the needs of the community change. For example, the yearly concert was cancelled in 2014 due to a lack of participants. Also, while HBLN ran conferences for the HBL community in WA in the past, lately they have found that conferences are not a good use of time. Therefore, they are not planning any conferences in the near future. As one participant explained about a previous conference:

The feedback we got on the last conference was quite good, but for the amount of work that went into organising and running it … we only had 80 members attending, and the number of volunteer hours involved with that would have been up to 1000 hours. So a 1000 volunteer hours for 80 people is not a really good return.

The coordinator and HBLN committee organise many events with the help of volunteers. Some of these events are well-attended, while others are not. The geographical spread of the HBL community in WA with resulting long traveling distances and time constrains in general are held as reasons why some events are not well-attended.

Each of the events organised by HBLN will now briefly be described in turn.

**Sports Day**

The sports day is an annual event which showcases the HBL youth and community spirit. It was first mentioned in an HBLN newsletter in 1992 as ‘The Sport Fun Day’. It was changed to its current format by the HBLN coordinator in 2008. The event grew from one with about 50 participants in 2008 to 300 participants in 2014, or in the words of one participant, “the size of a primary school sports day”. The high interest in the event indicates that the sports day meets a need of the HBL community.
Ball for Teens
Since 2013, HBLN/HEWA organised a ball for the HBL teenagers. Homeschoolers, or those who had been homeschooled in the previous 12 months, who were 13 to 19 years of age, were invited to attend the ball. In 2014 the ball was attended by more than 90 home-educated teens.

Science Fair
HBLN started to organise a yearly science fair aimed at primary to middle-school aged homeschoolers. It was described by one participant as “a great day with heaps of hands on activities plus workshops for the kids to participate in”. It is usually run in the second term of each year. The HBLN coordinator during the time of data collection stated: “Science is one of my interests, so I got the science fair up and running”.

Teen Café
Teen café is a monthly gathering for homeschooled teens. It is described as a “social gathering to dance, listen to music and play board games”.

Concerts
Concerts, showcasing homeschool talent, have been organised since the early 1990s. Unfortunately in 2014, the HBLN concert had to be cancelled due to a lack of interest. Local groups organised their own concerts or talent shows instead.

Art Festival
An art festival was run in 2013. Despite not having as much artworks on show as expected, the festival was considered to be a success. It gave the HBL community good exposure amongst the non-HBL community. However, the amount of work involved in organising the festival and the number of people that participated, led to the HBLN committee deciding that the event would not be run again.
Film Festival

In 2014, HBLN ran a film festival. The low level of interest was similar to that regarding the art festival the previous year. Only 14 children were involved in the films submitted. Most of the submissions came from committee members’ children.

Adventure World Day

The Adventure World day is a once-a-year outing for HBL families that HBLN organises near the end of each year (summer in WA). Adventure World is a water park in Perth. HBLN negotiates reduced entrance fees for its members at the water park. This event is considered by many homeschoolers as the most successful event because, as one participant put it, “it is really a good place to get everyone together and everyone is happy with that”.

5.3.1.3 Insurance Provision

The third sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘insurance provision’. HBLN is providing insurance to the HBL community in WA. Organisers of HBL events can get Liability Insurance and Workers Compensation Insurance through HBLN. Indeed, many of the interviewed HBL leaders considered insurance as one of the main reasons why many members join HBLN.

5.3.1.4 Support to Smaller HBL Groups

The fourth sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘support to smaller HBL groups’. Smaller groups include local groups for homeschoolers in a specific geographical area, groups following a specific philosophy or religious persuasion, or groups offering specific educational classes, like homeschool co-ops. HBL support-group leaders claim that smaller HBL groups are valuable in the support of homeschoolers, especially families new to homeschooling. It is acknowledged that new families are ‘very needy’ when they start homeschooling. It is perceived that the
best place to get their needs met is in a small local HBL group. The small local group can also provide knowledge about local resources and moral support. Thus HBLN puts new families into contact with local groups.

The participants held that there are not enough groups to service the needs of the community. People regularly contact the HBLN coordinator to find out about groups that they could join. However, many of the groups are oversubscribed and cannot take on more people. It is held by leaders of HBL support organisations that the HBL community is large, that “there are so many different things going on”, and that “people coming to activities have a diverse set of needs”. HBLN committee members, however, do try to up-skill people interested in starting new groups or in activities to provide for the diverse needs of the HBL community.

The HBLN coordinator explained that HBLN “wants to grow groups” by supporting people who want to start new groups or activities for the HBL community in WA. All HBLN members are encouraged to form smaller, purpose-specific or location-specific groups. HBLN wants to make the process of starting new groups as easy as possible for general members of the HBL community. This is done by providing resources for people to establish their own groups. HBLN also helps new groups in setting up their policies and procedures, obtaining insurance and obtaining help to advertise.

HBLN leaders stated that people attending their workshops, especially the ‘getting-started’ and ‘moderator’ workshops, are usually interested in getting involved with local groups. If there is not a local group catering for their needs in their area, they are usually willing to organise or share the role of starting a local group. It is held by the leaders that these new people are usually enthusiastic about their new homeschooling endeavour and want to be involved.
Once a new group is established and is running effectively, HBLN will continue to support it. The support takes the form of advice, encouragement, insurance cover, and providing a forum to advertise on the HBLN website and in the newsletter. However, the smaller groups are run and organised by their own members.

5.3.1.5 Inclusive Organisation

The fifth sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘inclusive organisation’. It is one of the written, constitutional objectives of HBLN that it is to be “a non-party political and non-sectarian organisation”. HBLN functions as an inclusive organisation that, in the words of the HBLN constitution, “provides social contact and support for all families involved in home-based education. It is not affiliated with, or does not support, a specific religion. Also, HBLN does not promote one HBL practice or philosophy. When HBLN committee members liaise with the Department of Education or moderators, they represent the wide HBL community and advocate for all homeschoolers. As one of the participants explained about the organisation’s negotiations with the Department: “the HBLN committee members have to make sure that all homeschoolers will be happy with and able to comply with the Department’s requirements.” Further, HBLN caters for HBL children of all ages.

5.3.1.6 Support for New HBL Families

The sixth sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘support for new HBL families’. It is one of HBLN’s main functions to provide information to families considering homeschooling and to support those starting to homeschool. Parents who never planned to home-educate, but felt obligated to take their children out of school for one of many reasons, are perceived to be most in need of support and information at the start of their homeschooling journey. Information on different topics relevant to new homeschoolers is provided on the HBLN website, including contact
details of local contact persons and local groups. It is up to the new homeschooling parents to contact and get involved with local groups. It is held that contact with other groups is important to new homeschoolers as they can provide social support, local knowledge, and resources.

5.3.1.7 Liaise with National Home-education Networks

The seventh sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘liaise with national home-education networks’. HBLN liaises with other national home-education organisations and networks to ensure that the HBL community in WA is aware of national developments and legislation changes. Also, HBLN works with other national home-education networks to increase their strength found in numbers when negotiating with product and service providers in order to get discounts for their members.

5.3.1.8 Enable Contact amongst HBL Families

The eighth sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘enable contact amongst HBL families’. It is one of the written, constitutional objectives of HBLN to “provide social contact and support for all families involved in home-based education”.

There are different ways in which HBLN enables contact to be made amongst members of the HBL community in WA. The first, as previously mentioned, is through events organised by them. One participant illustrated the role of smaller groups when she explains that although many homeschoolers start attending homeschool support groups for educational or academic reasons “when you start coming, you realise other benefits: social connections, especially when children become teenagers”. It is also held that joining the HBLN committee or volunteering as a local contact person are good ways to get to know a lot of people and establish contact amongst them.
5.3.1.9  ‘Mum Supports’

The ninth sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is what some participants described as ‘mum supports’. This function is considered by most participants to be an ‘official’ function of HBLN and an interpretation of the constitutional objective to ‘provide social contact and support for all families involved in home-based education’. Others hold that it is an ‘unintentional function’.

It is held that it is sometimes difficult to be a homeschooling parent-teacher within the non-homeschooling community. Homeschooling parent-teachers regularly feel criticised by non-homeschooling family members. They can feel they are ‘the odd one out’ amongst parents of children in public or private schools. Being part of a large homeschooling group like HBLN normalises the homeschooling lifestyle for them.

HBLN creates the opportunity for homeschoolers to be amongst people with the same view about educating children. This can create a sense of normality for the homeschoolers. On this, one participant who described her emotions at the start of her homeschooling journey said that being amongst other homeschoolers, made her feel ‘normal’.

Other participants also described “a significant amount of pressure” that, they felt, most homeschoolers experience to “not start homeschooling”. One participant explained that at the beginning of her family’s homeschooling journey people regularly said to her: “What nerve do you have to do this, you’re not a teacher, you can’t possibly be able to teach your kids”. They explained that although the HBLN coordinator and other contact people provided support and reassurance, “it is not until you can get yourself into the community that you can get the support you need to keep going … and to feel that you are not so isolated and abnormal.”
The presence of an organisation like HBLN can make the members of the HBL community ‘comfortable’, and create the impression that “they are not alone” and that there is “someone that will help them”. They can come to believe that HBLN “is there for” the HBL community in WA. This is true for both HBLN members and non-members.

5.3.1.10 Acceptance of Special-Needs Families

The tenth sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘acceptance of special-needs families’. Since members of HBLN are not asked why they homeschool, it is not possible to determine exactly what section of their membership is homeschooling special-needs children. However, it was considered by the participants to be a large number. These children and their families need acceptance and social contact. The children ‘like being around other kids who are similar to them’. Some of the participants explained that many of the smaller homeschool groups have families with ‘quirky kids’ in them, and they are accepted within these groups. She compared her children’s acceptance by the homeschool group, with their experience of not fitting in and not being accepted at a ‘normal school’. On this she continued:

The kids try so hard to fit in at school and that just creates absolute hatred for everybody. There is just so much competition and peer pressure in high school, and you don’t get to know yourself. To truly know yourself, you need time to know yourself, without having people bombarding you with what you should and shouldn’t do, and I do not think that was ever going to happen at high school.

A participant also explained that special-needs children can influence the learning approach of the family, because “they will not be able to cope with a formal, strict curriculum”. It is thus important, it is held, that parents of special-needs children get guidance when deciding on a learning approach for their children. Another participant with children in this group started out following a natural learning approach, but then
changed. She explained: “It was very hard for me to turn around from believing that ‘they’ll learn, it’ll happen, when they are ready’, and to accept that your children are not learning and a new approach is needed”. She ended up with a learning approach that she describes as ‘planned and structured natural learning’.

5.3.1.11 Put to Rest Concerns of HBL Community

The eleventh sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘put to rest concerns of HBL community’. The HBL community is exposed to advice and criticism from an uninformed general public and often also from family members, school teachers, principals and moderators. A lot of anguish is created around different HBL issues like socialisation and the transition of homeschoolers to university. The concerned person can bring such issues to the attention of the HBLN committee and the members would investigate the situation to get the facts. HBLN would then communicate the facts back to the concerned parties. Depending on the nature of the issue, they would also bring the information to the attention of all of the HBLN members. This can be done via newsletter, e-mail, social media and at workshops. The relevant information is also put on the HBLN website. If it is a matter of misinterpretation on the side of the Department of Education or a moderator, the issue is also taken up with them.

5.3.1.12 Discounted Resources and Event Entrances

The twelfth sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘discounted resources and event entrances’. HBLN liaises with providers of relevant educational resources and events to get the best deals for its members. From the beginning of HBLN, it tried to bargain for its members for discounted or free services, educational resources and admissions to events. At the time the study reported here was conducted,
the HBLN website listed resources for pre-school, primary school, high school, and even tertiary education.

HBLN secures new resources for members that they can use for free as part of their membership. To get access to these resources, members have to log into the HBLN website and follow the link in the member’s area. These resources included Newsacademic. This is a resource designed to help with the SOSE, English and LOTE part of homeschool programmes, by giving access to international roundup of news designed for children, and by providing accompanying activity sheets for basic and advanced material. Cosmos is a similar science-related resource.

At the time the study being reported here was conducted, HBLN members could get access to the following educational programmes at discounted rates negotiated by HBLN: Mathletics, Spelldrome, Artventure, ABC Reading Eggs, LiteracyPlanet, Skwirk, and Rosetta Stone. The discounts on these resources can be substantial. Members are able to register for these programmes on the Store page of the HBLN website and use Paypal or a direct deposit to pay the discounted amount during a specific registration period.

5.3.1.13 Protecting the Rights of and Advocating for the HBL Community

The thirteenth sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘protecting the rights of, and advocating for, the HBL community’. There is a perception amongst the HBL support-group leaders in WA that, as one put it, “if something is going down, like changes in the Education Act, HBLN will be advocating”.

The HBL support-group leaders perceive part of the committee’s duties to be to monitor changes in legal issues and changes in policies, and to deal with government. As the
HBLN coordinator put it, “I am particularly interested in preserving our rights.” Part of the coordinator’s role on the committee is to keep track of any changes in government policy that might start to creep in. Then she has to react on these changes by getting the facts and communicate with the parties involved. She also has to identify issues that may have a negative impact on the HBL community. This is done by studying newsletters of different organisations and building relationships with people who can help HBLN.

One of the HBLN committee members referred to a situation where the Department of Education “put their interpretation on the home-education part of the Education Act, and their interpretation was stricter than they were legally allowed to enforce”. As soon as the HBLN committee became aware of the situation they lobbied against the policy. Members created per forma letters and asked fellow members to send them to the Department of Education. According to one participant, this letter campaign turned ‘that around very quickly’. Within two months after starting the letter campaign, HBLN had the assurance that the policy was seen to be outside the legality of the act and that the policy would be rewritten.

The HBL community is frequently not aware of HBLN protecting their rights and advocating for them. As one HBLN committee member explained:

> I was not aware of the political stuff before I joined the committee. That’s just mind blowing. Stuff we have been protected from, because HBLN deals with that. Things like Centerlink (welfare payment). If HBLN can deal with that, then hopefully, parents won’t even have to know that it even happened in the past.

It is also perceived that HBLN advocates for the HBL community by working with families whose applications to homeschool have been rejected by the Department of Education. HBLN committee members or other available HBLN leaders assist them in
trying to find a solution. They help the family to become aware of what is expected and
get registered.

5.3.1.14 Give Voice to the HBL Community

The fourteenth sub-theme generated regarding ‘official functions of HBLN’ is ‘give
voice to the HBL community. The HBLN committee members are also well-positioned
to talk to different audiences as representatives of the HBL community in WA.
Different audiences can include the general public, government, groups within the HBL
community, and the media. A related way in which HBLN gives voice to the HBL
community in WA is by providing a forum for the community to discuss relevant issues,
share needs and advertise educational opportunities.

5.3.2 Non-official Functions Performed by HBLN

The second theme generated regarding functions of HBLN that HBL support-group
leaders in WA identified, are those functions they perceive as being non-official
functions or duties. On this, they recognise that in their support for the HBL community
in WA, HBLN committee members go beyond their official duties. Non-official duties
are not written in their constitution. Rather, they have to do with behind-the-scene
activities which the HBL community is not always aware of, but which are valuable in
dealing with community issues.

Within the theme ‘non-official duties’, two sub-themes were generated which will now
be discussed in turn. These sub-themes are ‘links between the HBL community and the
Department of Education’ and ‘informing decision-making’.
5.3.2.1  Link between the HBL Community and the Department of Education

The first sub-theme generated regarding ‘non-official functions of HBLN’ is ‘link between the HBL community in WA and the Department of Education in WA’. At the time the study reported here was conducted there was no official relationship between HBLN and the Department. However, the HBLN committee tried to improve the relationship with the Department to benefit both. It was held that this relationship had been strained, but since the change in the structure of the HBLN committee in April 2013, it had improved.

At the time of the study reported here was being conducted, the HBLN committee was holding meetings with the Education Department twice a year. The purpose of these meetings was to keep dialogue open between the moderators and the HBL community. The HBLN committee aims to disseminate a good understanding of the needs and concerns of the HBL community and different groupings within the community. They also want to get information from the Department that can help the HBL community and to ensure that the information they provide to the HBL community is accurate.

While HBLN would like to see an improved and structured working relationship between them and the Department of Education, limited finances and volunteer availability restrict their input. However, the participants stated that if policies that might have an adverse effect on the HBL community started to creep in, they would immediately start to advocate for the HBL community’s rights.

5.3.2.2  Informing Decision-Making

The second sub-theme generated regarding ‘non-official functions of HBLN’ is ‘informing decision-making’. It is held by HBLN committee members that an unofficial function they perform is to inform decision-making in the HBL community in WA. The
HBLN committee makes the community aware of changes in legislation applicable to them. These can include providing information on the legality of HBL, changes in the Education Act, financial issues like tax benefits and Centrelink changes, and future pathways for HBL graduates. The organisation also explains the possible impact that these changes may have on them and makes suggestions on how to deal with them. One of the participants explained that these activities are not part of an official function of HBLN, but they engage in them anyway.

5.3.3 Unintended Functions

The third theme generated regarding functions of HBLN that HBL support-group leaders in WA identified, is ‘unintended functions’. These unintended functions can be considered functions the organisation never intended to fulfil, yet are perceived by the participants to be fulfilled. They are not written in the constitution or communicated in official documents. Yet, the participants indicated that they value HBLN fulfilling them.

One significant unintended function of HBLN identified is changing new homeschoolers’ views on how their children can learn best, and as a result, how to make changes to the way they organise their homeschooling.

5.3.3.1 Raise Awareness of How Children Learn and How Homeschooling is Organised

A sub-theme generated regarding ‘unintended functions’ is ‘raise awareness of how children learn and how homeschooling is organised’. An unintended, but clearly evident function of homeschool support organisations is making homeschoolers aware of how their children learn best. Such awareness can lead to a change in how learning takes place and how homeschool parents facilitate their children’s learning at home. Many parents come to homeschooling from a formal education background and try to transfer ‘school teaching methods’ to the home. Through informally sharing ideas at
homeschool support group meetings, they soon discover, as one put it, that “the way things are done at school is not the best way to do it at home”. Through social interaction with other ‘older’ homeschoolers, they become aware, in the words of the same participant, that “it is OK not to be as strict or follow school ways at home”.

Another participant indicated that she considered being a qualified teacher and working as a teacher before homeschooling her children, as a ‘hurdle’ in her homeschooling. Through meeting other homeschoolers, and talking to them, she came to the belief that her child’s learning should not be focused on such performance as neat handwriting, but on character building instead. She also discovered that her children learnt in different ways. She went through a stage she described as ‘deschooling’. She clarified this process by explaining that it involves ‘unlearning’ or changing one’s way of teaching from what is regarded as a ‘teaching in school’ style to a ‘learning as a lifestyle’. She ascribed this change to meeting with and learning from long-term homeschoolers at HBLN events.

5.3.4 Undesired Functions

The fourth theme generated regarding functions of HBLN that HBL support-group leaders in WA identified, is ‘undesired functions’. On these, HBL leaders gave examples of some members of the HBL community in WA that expect HBLN to fulfil functions not written in the HBLN constitution, that the organisation never committed to fulfil, and that it would not want to fulfil.

Four sub-themes were generated regarding ‘undesired functions’, namely ‘running classes’, ‘creating contacts between members within a local community’, ‘supplementing what is done at home’ and ‘liaising with specific venues or libraries’. Each of these sub-themes will now be discussed in turn.
5.3.4.1 Running Classes

The first sub-theme generated regarding ‘undesired functions’ is ‘running classes’. Participants argued that it is not the function of HBLN to provide academic classes for children. This function is provided through other homeschool support organisations, like the numerous homeschool co-ops and specific groups within the State. However, it is held that many homeschool parents contact HBLN about the need for formal classes. One participant stated that she “did not feel confident with all subjects” and was looking for a group where her children could learn Latin and other formal subjects within a small, informal environment. As HBLN does not run this type of classes, she had to start her own group and employ a teacher to run the classes.

5.3.4.2 Creating Contacts between Members within a Local Community

The second sub-theme generated regarding ‘undesired functions’ is ‘creating contacts between members within a local community’. While HBLN provides contact details of groups in local areas, the HBLN committee does not consider it their duty to establish contacts between members within a local community. One participant explained that this is partly because HBLN and all other HBL groups are run by volunteers who do not have the time to facilitate homeschoolers getting together at a local level. They give contact details to new people, but it is up to the new members to make contact themselves with the local groups or homeschooling families following the same educational philosophy or style. It is also up to the new homeschooling parents to develop relationships within the local community.

5.3.4.3 Supplementing what is done at Home

The third sub-theme generated regarding ‘undesired functions’ is ‘supplementing what is done at home’. It is held that it is not HBLN’s responsibility to supplement what is done at home to create a full-rounded education for homeschool children. Participants
stated that there is an expectation amongst some homeschooling parents for HBLN to give them detailed guidance in the education of their children. As one participant exclaimed, “It feels as if she (new homeschooling mum) want HBLN to take over the education of her children! I, and all other HBLN committee members, have our own kids to educate!”

5.3.4.4 Liaising with Specific Venues and Libraries

The fourth sub-theme generated regarding ‘undesired functions’ is ‘liaising with specific venues and libraries’. Many homeschoolers use “what is available in the community” to enhance their learning. Some homeschoolers, however, look to HBLN to identify and advertise learning experiences available in the community. They specifically referred to the opportunities of community involvement provided by local city or shire councils. Local councils also have venues suitable for HBL group activities such as community halls and libraries. The participants stressed that it is not HBLN’s function to liaise with local city or shire councils about venues or involvement of homeschoolers in public events. It is held that it is up to local HBL support groups to liaise with their city or shire council. If the local support group identifies an event or opportunity being run by their council they can advertise it in the HBLN’s newsletters and social media outlets.

5.3.5 Aspirational Functions

The fifth theme generated regarding functions of HBLN that HBL support-group leaders in WA identified, is ‘aspirational functions’. Aspirational functions can be described as those functions that HBLN would like to fulfil, but due to various reasons, the organisation is currently not able to fulfil them. Again, these functions are not written in the HBLN constitution and the organisation never committed itself to fulfil
them. However, the HBL support-group leaders appreciate the value that fulfilling such functions could provide for the HBL community in WA.

Regarding ‘aspirational functions’ two sub-themes were generated, namely ‘formation of local groups’ and ‘helping the Department of Education with moderators’. These two sub-themes will now be discussed in turn.

5.3.5.1 Formation of Local Groups

The first sub-theme generated regarding ‘aspirational functions’ is ‘formation of local groups’. It is an aspirational function of HBLN to improve support to the HBL community in WA by forming local groups within the HBL community in WA. On this, the HBLN coordinator stated that “support is best provided on a local level”.

Many areas within the State have been identified as being without a local HBL support group. Also, it is perceived that some existing local support groups do not support their community effectively. Some groups do form in reaction to such a need in the community, but members often do not have the know-how and skills to keep the group going. HBLN aspires to provide support in this regard.

It is also held that many local groups develop independent of HBLN intervention. Local support groups can spontaneously form when homeschoolers living in the same area choose to get together on a regular basis and support each other. Such smaller HBL support groups, it is held, can also develop amongst HBL families sharing the same interests or beliefs, following the same educational philosophy, or using the same curriculum.

The HBLN coordinator envisions an HBL support system similar to that provided to WA families with babies and young children by the West Australian Community Child Health Nurses organisation. After a birth, the details of the family are passed on to the
community nurse in the area/suburb or regional area in question. The nurse makes contact with the new family to make sure that they are coping with the new situation. The nurse also organises a get-together of local families who had babies in the previous six months and helps them start a local parenting support group. These parenting support groups provide opportunities for new parents to meet other fathers and mothers, and share experiences. They also provide them with a way to obtain information on health and parenting (Department of Health, 2013).

5.3.5.2 Helping the Department of Education with Moderators

The second sub-theme generated regarding ‘aspirational functions’ is ‘helping the Department of Education with moderators’. HBLN would like to help the Department of Education to develop effective structures for dealing with the homeschool community. HBLN would like to provide training and professional development opportunities for home-education moderators. HBLN leaders would also like to assist the Department to develop a uniform way to deal with the homeschool community, including producing moderator-visit guidelines.

At the time the study being reported here was conducted, HBLN was not in a position to fulfil such a function. In the past HBLN offered to assist the Department in this regard, but the Department never accepted the offer. However, at the time the study reported here was conducted, HBLN did not have the resources to fulfil this function, even if the Department would seek assistance from their side with the training of moderators and development of documents relating to home-education moderation.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an analysis of the background and functions of HBLN in WA in providing support to or meet the diverse needs of the HBL community in the State. The
research findings in relation to the first two research questions, namely the background of HBLN in WA, and the functions of HBLN in WA as articulated in 2014, were outlined. The concerns reported by the same HBL support-group leaders are now presented in the following four chapters.
CHAPTER 6
THE CONCERNS OF LEADERS OF HBL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS IN WA RELATED TO THE VARIOUS CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HBL COMMUNITY IN WA

The previous chapter described the background and functions of home-based learning (HBL) support organisations in Western Australia (WA). This chapter and the next three present an analysis of the issues of concern for HBL support-organisation leaders in carrying out their functions.

HBL support-organisation leaders in WA are faced with various issues of concern when supporting the HBL community in WA. Regarding the issues of concern four areas of concern were generated. The first area of concern related to the various characteristics of the HBL community in WA. The second area of concern related to various authorities to whom they have to pay attention. The third area of concern related to the practice of HBL. The fourth area of concern related to how the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) functions as an organisation. The first of these areas of concern will be addressed in the remainder of this chapter and the other three areas of concern will be dealt with in the next three chapters.

Regarding the first area of concern with which HBL support-organisation leaders have to deal, namely, ‘the various characteristics of the HBL community in WA’, four themes were generated: ‘demographics’; ‘motivation for homeschooling’; ‘the nature of the students’; and ‘the nature of the parents’. These are explicated in the four main sections of this chapter.
6.1 ISSUES RELATED TO THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE HBL COMMUNITY IN WA

The first theme of issues of concern that faces HBL support organisations in WA which relates to the area of concern ‘various characteristics of the HBL community’, is ‘demographics’. This theme can in turn be considered under four sub-themes, namely, ‘numbers’, ‘growth’, ‘geographical spread’ and ‘family circumstances’. Each of these sub-themes will now be considered in turn.

6.1.1 Numbers

The first sub-theme generated in relation to ‘demographics’ is ‘numbers’. It is difficult to determine the extent of homeschooling in WA. Participants in the study being reported here made some qualitative statements in this regards describing the HBL community as ‘large’ and ‘rapidly growing’, but also indicated that it is very difficult to determine definite numbers for homeschooled children in the State. This is because, the participants claim, it is difficult to get numbers from the WA Department of Education. Furthermore, even if the numbers were available, it would not give a full picture of the extent of families homeschooling because, according to homeschoolers themselves, a large portion of homeschooling families do not register with the Department. Furthermore, HBLN and most other homeschool support organisations do not make their numbers public ‘for privacy reasons’. When asked directly in the course of this study, HBLN committee members indicated that between 600 and 1000 families were at the time (2014) enrolled with them.

Some of the smaller homeschooling groups are willing to share their numbers. For example, there is a group of 300 children from 75 families, and another group of 24 children in 8 families. Both groups meet weekly. However, they represent only a small number of groups across the wider homeschooling scene.
Some support groups can be considered as ‘open’, meaning that they do not keep a record of who, or how many, attend their get-togethers or make use of their services. Also, it is not a requirement to register or be a member of HBLN to take part in activities organised by most groups. One of the participants in the study being reported here indicated that her group does ask members about HBLN membership because they uses HBLN’s insurance. Non-HBLN members have to pay extra for activities to cover their insurance.

Administrators of the various closed online homeschool-support groups in WA can easily determine the number of members of their groups. For example, the largest of these groups at the time of the study, Homeschooling Perth, accepted its 1000th member at the beginning of 2015. Despite all members of the closed online groups having to be homeschooling to be allowed to become members, group administrators are not aware if individual group members are registered at the Department, if they are members of HBLN, or even if in fact they are still homeschooling.

The HBL support-group leaders who participated in the study being reported here indicated that they are aware of substantial numbers of homeschoolers attending the smaller groups who are neither registered with the Department of Education, nor members of HBLN. This is echoed by a participant who referred to literature and statistics indicating that half of all homeschoolers in WA do not register with the Department of Education. On this, he pointed to statistics for 2014 showing 1.2% of school-age children in Australia were being home-educated at the time (0.6% registered and 0.6% unregistered).

6.1.2 Growth

The second sub-theme generated regarding ‘demographics’ that is an issue of concern for the HBL support-organisation leaders has to do with the growing nature of the HBL
community. All of the participants in the study stated they are convinced that homeschooling is growing in WA. Also, this is not deemed to be a serious concern by support-group leaders, although they do see that it presents difficulties and challenges for them in supporting the homeschooling community.

Participants in the study reported in this thesis offered various reasons for the increase in the numbers in the homeschooling community in the State. Under the sub-theme ‘growth’, three properties were generated, namely, ‘dissatisfaction with the school experience’, ‘lifestyle choice’ and ‘second-generation homeschoolers’. Each of these properties brings their unique challenges to HBL support groups in their task of supporting the HBL community in WA.

Regarding the first property, parents claim they are dissatisfied with regular school. This was summed up by a participant, when she stated that her children were “bored out of their brains at school and need more stimulation than school can provide”. Also, homeschoolers claimed, the children do not get the needed educational support from regular schooling, especially in cases of undiagnosed special-needs children. Some also have unresolved bullying issues. Immigrants were singled out as a group that are generally more inclined to be dissatisfied with the behaviour and discipline in schools in WA and who choose to homeschool. On this, one participant stated that since WA has a high immigration rate compared to other countries, immigrants seems to be “pushing the homeschool market”.

The second property of ‘growth’ is ‘lifestyle choice’. An increasing number of parents choose to home-educate because it suits their lifestyle. They choose to organise their family life around what is important to them, whether it is their spiritual beliefs, family relationships, or their view of how children learn best. Also, families with a few children under school-age may homeschool their older school-age children as a way to
simplify their living circumstance. This is also true of some families with sick family members. Other families homeschool to give them the freedom to travel for extended periods around Australia or even the world. This is because homeschooling fits in with their traveling lifestyle.

Other parents choose homeschooling over moving their children from school to school when their work commitment requires of them to relocate regularly. “It’s just about how we wish to live our lives”, is how one parent described her choice in this regard. There is also a view that starting to homeschool for lifestyle reasons is on the increase. On this, it is also perceived that it is getting easier to home-educate for a number of reasons. First, information about homeschooling is becoming more readily available in the media and elsewhere. Secondly, homeschooling is becoming more acceptable to the non-homeschooling community. Thirdly, more support groups have been formed, offering services and activities to homeschoolers. As a result, new homeschoolers feel confident to start homeschooling. As one participant said, “twenty years ago, when we started to homeschool, nobody seemed to know a homeschooler, but now there is a growing understanding and acceptance that homeschooling is perfectly OK”.

The third property generated for strong growth in HBL numbers comes from a group consisting of those home-education graduates in WA who is turning into second-generation homeschoolers. On this, some HBL support-group leaders indicated that they already saw second-generation homeschoolers coming to their groups, while others expressed the sentiment that “our children will have the same opportunities we had to home-educate their children”. On this, the participant referred to a study he conducted amongst the body of homeschoolers involved with his support group which indicated that 94% of them planned to home-educate their children.
6.1.3 Geographical Spread

The third sub-theme generated regarding ‘demographics’ that is an issue of concern for the leaders of HBL support organisations in WA has to do with the geographical spread of the HBL community. This community is spread out over the State; WA covers a land area of 2,529,875 square kilometres and occupies a third of the continent of Australia. According to the 2011 census, 77% of the 2.565 million inhabitants live in the greater Perth Metropolitan Area. According to HBLN leaders interviewed, about 75% of their members live in this area, while the other members either live in regional towns, or on farms in the vast areas between these towns. Regional towns with homeschooling families include Bunbury and Albany in the southwest of WA, the mining town of Kalgoorlie-Boulder (597 km east of Perth), the coastal town of Geraldton, and Karratha, Port Hedland and Broome in the far north of WA. Broome, by road is 2,240 km from Perth.

Even within the Perth Metropolitan Area the geographical spread of the HBL community, it is claimed, has an influence on the HBL support-organisation leaders. When considering that 75 percent of HBLN members live in this area, the participants said they are convinced that distance plays a role in the success of supporting this community. Talking about this area, they referred to the 140 km coastal strip from Mandurah and Pinjarra in the south to Two Rocks in the north, and inland east about 110 km to The Lakes (including Toodyay and Northam). Also, homeschoolers do not, as one put it, “form pockets” in specific suburbs or areas. Rather, they are spread out throughout all suburbs in the Perth area. As another participant put it, “they are everywhere.” Also, it is claimed that, while homeschoolers living on the fringes of the Perth Metropolitan Area tend to be involved with activities taking place centrally, they also tend to form local support groups.
Another participant produced a large map of WA and another of the Perth Metropolitan Area, indicating where all the homeschooling families who are supported by his organisation live. These maps confirmed that homeschooling families are spread throughout the State, as well as sprawled throughout the Perth Metropolitan Area. This member explained that his family started out as ‘country members’ of HBLN more than 20 years ago, but since then moved to Perth. On this, he stated: “We felt quite isolated when we were homeschooling in a small country town.” He now aims to serve country members in a similar manner as city members.

Although the wide-spread locations of homeschooling families are more a reality than a problem for the national homeschool support providers, these organisations and the way they provide support are influenced by the distance members have to travel to attend activities or to get access to services. Homeschoolers living far from Perth cannot regularly travel long distances to attend central activities. To overcome this problem, HBLN motivates and supports country members to organise local support groups for homeschoolers in their town or area. HBLN also uses its website to provide information for the country members.

The geographical spread of the homeschool community also influences the management of HBLN. One participant, who is part of a homeschool co-op operating on the fringes of Perth, indicated that initially their co-op had a representative on the HBLN committee, but this became untenable. She described how their representative had to drive two hours to attend the monthly committee meetings. With meetings finishing after midnight, the representative would sometimes nearly fall asleep driving home.

Homeschoolers living far from where activities are held have to weigh up the distance and time to travel in relation to the time involved in, and the perceived value of, the activities. In some cases they consider that the cost outweighs the benefit. This can
result in homeschoolers not volunteering at or participating in HBLN events. Some mothers prefer to stay at home because travel is time-consuming and very tiring for them and their children. As one participant explained, “the distance is not working for us; it’s just not practical for us. It is hard for us to be involved with HBLN because everything is so far away”.

Notwithstanding the negative influence that distance can have on attendance at homeschool events and activities, some families travel quite a distance to be involved with a specific activity. The reasons indicated include that the activity may be unique and be perceived as of value to them; the members can develop friendships; or as one participant put it, finding they belong to “a really friendly group” where everyone can feel accepted. At the same time, it is recognised that while friendships develop as a result of children and parents meeting at central events, these can be difficult to maintain when families live far from each other.

The wide-spread nature of the WA homeschool community challenges the homeschool support organisations to rethink the way in which they support them. The fact that people have to travel long distances to get to events may influence their interest in and willingness to volunteer at these events. HBLN, as one participant put it, aims to support country members by “getting info on the website”.

6.1.4 Family Circumstances

The fourth sub-theme generated regarding the theme ‘demographics’ within the area of concern ‘various characteristics of HBL community’, is ‘family circumstances’. Each homeschool family has a specific set of family circumstances that can have an impact on the challenges they face and on the expectations they have of support organisations.
Regarding issues of family circumstances, three properties were generated, namely ‘family size’, ‘age of the children’ and ‘family combination’. Each of these properties will now be addressed in turn. The impact of each of these properties on HBL support-organisation leaders, will also be illustrated.

### 6.1.4.1 Family size

There is a perception that the size of the HBL family can have an influence on the type of HBL support needed. The family sizes of HBL families range from those with only one child to those with more than eight children.

Children of large families, it is held, can experience different conditions to those in smaller or one-child families. Children in larger families, homeschoolers argue, have the advantage of having relationships with siblings. They stated that these relationships and associated interactions give them the opportunity to have companionship, emotional support and assistance while growing up. Children in larger families often experience rivalry and may need to jostle for parents’ attention. The positive interactions that occur between siblings contribute to perspective taking, moral maturity, and competence in relating to other children.

Homeschoolers also hold that single-child families generally look for opportunities for social interaction and friendships, while larger families do not necessarily have the need. Also, larger families may find it financially difficult to attend particular events. Mothers of babies may find it difficult and tiring to take their older children to various activities.

### 6.1.4.2 Age of the Children

The age of the children in each homeschool family, it is held, can also play a role in the type of support they look for from the support organisation. When looking at the age of
children in homeschooling families, families can be grouped into three types, namely, families with young children (including babies and pregnant mums), families with primary-school aged children, and families with high-school aged children (teenagers). Many do not fall exclusively within one of these groups. Rather, they can have children in two or all three of the age groups. There is also a group of homeschooling families where the older children, having finished homeschooling, are still involved while working or studying further.

Also important to highlight is that there is a perception that families with young children are more prone to being sick than others and there is a perception that in large social support groups gatherings ‘the bugs are past around’, with some families having different family members affected over a long period of time. This can lead to larger families withdrawing from various homeschool support activities while the younger members are still little. Single-parent families can also present additional challenges when homeschooling.

As homeschool children grow older, the family enters another stage that creates challenges for support services, namely, that of homeschooling teenagers. At the time the study being reported here was conducted, the number of primary-school-aged children being homeschooled in WA outweighed high-school-aged homeschoolers, but the number of teenage homeschoolers was increasing. It is held that the increase is not only from younger homeschooler maturing, but also because parents withdraw their children at the end of primary school or during the high-school years to start homeschooling.

Despite the fact that the number of teenage homeschoolers is growing, they are still relatively few in number compared to younger homeschoolers. Parent may find it more difficult to motivate teenagers to do their school work and need to teach their children to
be self-motivated. This is much easier when children are homeschooled from a young
age than when they start as teenagers.

Also, participants indicated that teenagers generally find it difficult to develop and
maintain meaningful friendships within the homeschool community. As one participant
put it:

Everyone says that homeschooling is not a problem and there are so
many social groups out there. This is true, but as your children get
older, there is less, and less and less. When they become teenagers, it
becomes very hard to find friends for them (within the home-
education community), many have gone to school … so socially it is
fun when they are young, but as they get older, it gets harder.

Often they have a smaller group of teenagers with whom to socialise, and fewer
activities are available for them.

6.1.4.3  Family Combination

Within the HBL community in WA, there are different family combinations. Although
most HBL families consist of a father and mother raising their own children (two-parent
families), there are also single-parent families and blended families (where either parent
brings with them children from a previous marriage). Also, there are families where the
grandparent(s) live with the two-parent family, and single-parent families live in the
home of the grandparents. Single-parent families are headed by a widowed or divorced
female parent. In single-parent families resulting from divorce, the absent parent may
have little or no involvement in the child's life and education, or, alternatively, may be
highly involved. Single-parent families are claimed to be more prone to suffer burn-out.

In addition to being a large, growing and wide-spread community, the individual
families within the homeschool community are perceived to differ in motivation,
homeschool focus, educational philosophy and stage of homeschooling. There is a view
that each homeschool family and specifically each homeschool parent-teacher, brings their own circumstance, abilities, needs and challenges to the table.

**6.2 ISSUES RELATED TO MOTIVATION FOR HOMESCHOOLING**

The second theme generated regarding issues of concern that faces HBL support organisations in WA which relates to the various characteristics of the HBL community in the State, is ‘motivation for homeschooling’. This will now be considered under four sub-themes, namely, ‘motivation to start homeschooling’, ‘homeschool focus’, ‘educational philosophies’ and ‘different stages of homeschooling’.

**6.2.1 Motivation to Start Homeschooling**

Under ‘motivation to start homeschooling’, two properties were generated, namely ‘philosophical-based’ and ‘necessity-based’. It is held that homeschoolers can be grouped into two groups based on their motivation to start homeschooling their children. The first group, who can be referred to as philosophical-based homeschoolers, consists of mothers or parents who ‘always wanted to teach their children at home’. They usually homeschool ‘from the beginning’ (very young age) and enter formal homeschooling well-read and well-prepared, usually at the beginning of the year the child reaches compulsory school age. There is a perception that these parents do research on the practice of homeschooling and are usually life-long learners themselves. In general, parents who homeschool for religious/faith reasons can also be located in this group.

It is claimed that the second group, which can be referred to as necessity-based homeschoolers, consists of parents who do not necessarily want to homeschool, but pull, or have to pull, their children out of private or public schools because they ‘don’t fit in’. They are the children who usually do not progress as well as their parents want
them to, have special needs which are not met by the school, or experience anxiety or bullying at school. This issue was addressed by all but one participant. As one participant noticed, “people frequently come to home-education because there is a crisis”. The participants elaborated that these parents usually do not take their children out of school at the beginning of a school year, but either a few weeks after the school year had started, or later in the year. They are perceived as families who have never considered HBL up to that crisis point and commence the practice with very little knowledge about HBL.

One participant, now playing a leading role in the HBL community, explained as follows her original fears when starting her homeschool journey:

I was really scared of homeschooling to begin with for I just thought they will go to school, you know? … It took me forever to find a good school to put them in and I used to travel (far) every day to get them there. Ahm, and that didn’t work out, so homeschooling is the only option. … I was just ‘petrified’, you know, I did not know what I was doing. I did not know how to go about it. I had three kids, aged six, three and two of which the younger two have serious autism. How am I going to teach her, and do all this?

She concluded by saying that they immediately joined up with HBLN.

Philosophical and necessity-based homeschoolers are seen as differing widely from each other. As a result, their support needs also differ. While those of the philosophical-based group are usually self-motivated and seek out opportunities to realise their goals, it is perceived that ‘necessity-based’ homeschoolers have more needs. In particular, families in this group need to be educated about what HBL and homeschooling entails, and depending on the reasons and circumstances under which the children are pulled out, the family or child may need counselling or mentoring support.

There is also a perception amongst HBL leaders that the needs of the community have changed in recent years. They claim that people now need more structure and more
organised classes. HBLN members, especially new members, look to HBLN to provide this service. As a participant put it, “they consider HBLN to be a ‘paid organisation’ that should provide curriculum and to some extent basically should take over the role of home-education from them”.

HBLN equally acknowledges that there is a need in the community to provide services to parents who home-educate out of necessity as opposed to those who do it for philosophical reason. However, the HBLN leadership does not consider it the organisation’s function to meet all these needs. As the HBLN committee members see it, there are families that pull, or want to pull, their children out of school and are looking for something to replace school. They come into the HBL community looking for more structure and for more organised classes for their children, and they look to HBLN to provide this support. HBLN committee members claim that it is very difficult for the organisation to provide the level of support sought. They explain that these parents consider HBLN to be a ‘paid organisation’ that should provide a curriculum for them and must also be able to set up classes for them. They ask such questions as: “Does HBLN supply a curriculum? What classes does HBNL provide? What services does HBLN provide? Does HBLN provide counselling support? What access to services will we get if we become members?”

HBLN committee members clearly indicated that meeting these needs falls outside the constitutional objectives of HBLN. They argued further that they did not have the resources to meet these demands. This concurs with the official functions of the organisation as provided in Section 5.3.1 and the functions that are not desired as provided in Section 5.3.4. By enabling, motivating and facilitating new groups to form, participants in the study reported here, stated that they hoped the needed services would be provided. As one participant explained, “our co-op gives new parents somewhere to
go. It gives some parents the courage to start homeschooling because there are opportunities to meet-up”. The participants also held that HBLN can use its website and workshops to advertise and promote the new groups and classes.

### 6.2.2 Homeschool Focus

The second sub-theme generated regarding ‘motivation for homeschooling’ is ‘homeschool focus’. The homeschooling community in WA is perceived as diverse in relation to why members homeschool, or what they consider to be important for them. Although determining why homeschoolers homeschool was not one of the aims of the study being reported here, it became clear during the data analysis that homeschool support leaders are aware that a family’s homeschooling focus plays a large role in the type of support family members need, in where they find it, and in how readily this support is available. Focus areas include academic ones, those to do with social/emotional matters, sport, arts, lifestyle and religion. Also, most families do not have a single focus. Rather, they engage in homeschooling for a combination of these reasons.

The needs of HBL families differ depending on their objectives with homeschooling. The HBL leaders in WA are of the opinion that HBL families’ needs are best addressed within groups with a similar focus, as parents are naturally driven to identify, develop, and organise activities to enhance the specific aspect of their child’s development which they all regard as foremost. For example, parents of highly gifted children seek out connections with universities and organise homeschool teams to take part in competitions. Parents who value the role of art in development, go to great lengths to identify ‘the best’ motivated art teachers for classes, to organise outings to art galleries and even to organise homeschool art exhibitions. The same is true of families seeking out social, emotional and lifestyle opportunities for their children.
It was claimed by the participants that there are many families who homeschool for faith reasons. Some chose to become a member of the State-branch of a national organisation (HomeschoolWA) that gives them access to a specific, international Christian curriculum (ACE). This organisation has developed an extensive support system for its fee-paying members (including curriculum, teacher-support, mentors), but all other homeschoolers can gain access to information on their website and facebook page, and take part in organised activities.

For many other homeschooling families faith is important, but they tend not to follow the specific Christian curriculum provided by the organisation described above. These families want their children to socialise, develop friendships and explore educational topics within a community of like-minded homeschoolers. A number of faith-based groups for such families function successfully within the Perth area, including Protestant and Catholic ones. There are also Muslim homeschool support groups.

The various faith-based groups are difficult to identify, and vary in size and function. Members of one group with 300 children from 75 families have been meeting once a week for more than 20 years, and members of another group with more than 100 families meet in a park once a month. The first group is formal in the sense it offers various classes to its closed membership. The second group is more informal and does not keep records of members attending its meetings. It tries to create a social milieu conducive for members to explore and express needs, and develop strategies through smaller groups to address specific needs.

A third faith-based group identified consists of eight families (24 children) who meet on one afternoon a week at a church for classes and social events. Like the other two groups, they provide a service for Christian families, as one member put it, “where they can be protected from the influences of other groups”. The bonding factor is the faith-
support, even though members may differ widely in terms of their views on teaching style and discipline. Also, although most members of the groups tend not to over emphasise religious activities, some do have regular, often weekly, religious activities, including religion lessons, art-based religious activities and a focus on the Bible or Quran. These groups are usually ‘closed’ groups that only take in members of their own faith. They do not advertise, do not have websites, and do not generally have a social media presence. Of the faith-based HBL support groups, only HomeschoolWA and the Muslim homeschool support group had a social media presence at the beginning of 2015. As a result, it is very difficult to identify these groups and to become a member.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, HBLN is a non-sectarian, inclusive organisation that caters for all homeschoolers in WA. While HBLN supports homeschoolers in the academic, social/emotional, sport, arts, and lifestyle focus areas, it does not promote any specific religious activities. HBLN has an attitude, as a participant put it, of accepting one another. A few of the participants in the study being reported here indicated that many families homeschool because of their Christian beliefs, and that they want those values to be promoted in their children’s learning environment. These parents want to be part of HBL support groups that promote Christian values and influences on the families, both children and parents. Therefore, some of these parents experience HBLN’s inclusiveness as negative. They do not particularly want to join a group where their value systems are not going to be promoted. They would rather affiliate with groups like the four discussed above which create a social milieu for the children and parents where they feel safe and “everyone believes the same”. This also seems to be true of the Muslim homeschoolers, who aim to bring up their children with Islamic beliefs and try to make sure they are aware of Allah at all times.
6.2.3 Educational Philosophies

The third sub-theme generated regarding ‘motivation for homeschooling’ that influence the leaders of HBL support organisations in supporting the HBL community in WA, is ‘educational philosophies’. As discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, homeschoolers can have different philosophies of homeschooling and each of these tends to be supported in different ways. The participants in the study being reported here indicated that the associated methods that homeschoolers in WA use range from formal school-at-home and classical education to unschoolers/natural learners. Indeed, even within families, the method used can be different for different children. A homeschool parent should be sensitive to what works best for each child. As one participant put it, “what fits you, does not necessarily fit all of your children”.

This latter position has two implications for the homeschool support organisations. First, homeschoolers need to be aware of different ways to identify the most appropriate pedagogical method for their family or child. Secondly, HBLN should be careful not to be biased towards a certain approach. Some participants, especially those with a teaching background, feel that HBLN puts an over-emphasis on ‘natural learning’ over more ‘classical methods’. Although they acknowledge that there are different ways to homeschool, they “struggle with natural learners who get up in the morning whatever time they want to get up and basically do whatever they want to do”. On this, some participants claimed that some parents may not realise that they are possibly not addressing certain educational needs or legal requirements.

6.2.4 Different Stages of Homeschooling

It is also held that families within the homeschooling community can be at different stages in their homeschooling journey. It is claimed that at each stage they experience different needs, and may therefore have different expectations of support organisations.
On this, the following phases of homeschooling were identified in the study reported in this thesis: ‘beginners’, ‘settled-in homeschoolers’, ‘long-term homeschoolers’, ‘homeschool graduates’ and ‘retired homeschooling parents’.

‘Beginners’ are those just starting to homeschool. Participants claim that ‘beginners’ need much help and support. As one participant described it, “you are very needy when you are new to the home-education community”. They claim that it is important that ‘beginners’ get into contact with other groups, preferably small local groups, which can act as a font of knowledge and support, even if they are just visited on an ad hoc basis. Resource days, curriculum volunteers and go-to experienced mums are also identified as being able to help beginners in the initial homeschool experience.

One participant described her initial needs and how they changed as follows:

I was pretty much hysterical about what I was going to do. So, very much, at the start you need more compassion … you need more people not to judge you … you are going “What am I doing?” … But as you go along, you just need ideas … you need to bounce ideas. At the moment I can easily homeschool without going to groups, but the kids won’t like it, because they will not get to see people.

Such individuals can go on to become ‘settled-in’ and ‘long-term’ homeschoolers. Participants claim these groups are generally more confident and know what to do and where to have their needs met.

‘Settled-in’ homeschoolers are considered to be those who are homeschooling for a while and have developed strategies regarding curriculum and related activities. This group is usually looking for events, activities and outings to broaden the children’s curriculum and provide further social interaction opportunities.

‘Long-term’ homeschoolers include not only those parents who have been homeschooling for a long time, but also those who have already homeschooled a first
child ‘successfully’ through a specific educational stage and are now homeschooling a second child, or more. They recognise that they may need information on future pathways for their children. This group of ‘settled-in’ and ‘long-term’ homeschoolers can provide valuable support, guidance, and share knowledge with beginner mothers.

The last stage of homeschooling is when the children and parents have completed their homeschool journey, thus becoming homeschool graduates and ‘retired’ homeschooling parents. Parents stop homeschooling at various stages of their child’s educational journey. They do so for various reasons. Some keep on homeschooling until all their children have started university, enrolled at another adult educational institution like TAFE (Technical and Further Education institutes), or entered the workforce. Others send their children to high school in Year 8 or Year 11 to allow them to maximise the chance of gaining access to universities through the WACE certificate.

There are also groups that start homeschooling at the beginning of, or during, high-school years. This can be for various reasons. For example, it can be to deal with emotional issues or to ensure that their children get quality academic guidance. There are also groups that homeschool only the very young, either up to the middle primary-school age, or to the end of primary-school age.

A parent can be regarded as ‘retired’ when the family members have come to the end of their homeschooling journey and the children moved on to join the general community. The view of HBLN committee members is that ‘retired’ parents are those who want to move on with their lives and not contribute to the HBL community any more. Some participants also hold that they are aware of ‘retired’ homeschool parents who are still involved in the homeschool community, including those who work as parent helpers.
It is difficult to describe or talk about ‘successful homeschoolers’. After all, what is a successful homeschooler? Is it a person who homeschooled until the child reached 17 years of age or whose children got accepted into university or TAFE? Is it when a child enters or goes back to mainstream schooling and adapts well? Is it a family member who enjoys the HBL journey and learn progressively? Some parent may have to send their children to partake in mainstream education because of a change in their family situation, such as a mother having to start earning money outside the home. Is a ‘successful homeschooler’ a parent who came to the end of the period of homeschooling and all the family members have positive memories of, and attitudes towards, what and how the children learned? To draw this together, one can probably define a ‘successful homeschooler’ as one who perceives his or her HBL activities and time spent homeschooling as successful and positive, and who, when coming to the end of the HBL journey (for whatever reason), would do it again if placed in the same situation.

As the number of high-school homeschoolers is growing, the number of homeschool graduates is also growing. There is a view that this group can ‘give back’ to the homeschool community. HBLN however, has little contact with such ‘homeschooled graduates’ in WA. Nevertheless, a few graduates are still involved because younger members of their families are still being homeschooling. The testimonials of a number of these graduates appear on the HBLN website. Also, the HBLN committee acknowledges that these people are ‘young and lead busy lives’, and the majority do not want to be involved with HBL activities anymore. However, some participants in the study reported in this thesis shared stories that illustrate how homeschool graduates could serve as examples for younger children in the community, and teach classes and help out at homeschooling events.
6.3 ISSUES RELATED TO THE NATURE OF THE STUDENTS

The third theme generated regarding the various characteristics of the HBL community in WA that influences the HBL support organisations is ‘the nature of the students’. This theme is considered in terms of three sub-themes, namely ‘academic abilities’, ‘special needs’ and ‘challenges’. Each of these will now be considered in turn.

6.3.1 Academic Abilities

The academic abilities of HBL students in WA are claimed to range from academically gifted students to children who are slow learners. HBL support organisations have to deal with families from across this wide spectrum of abilities. A few gifted children belong to MENSA, an international organisation for persons with high IQ’s. They are being homeschooled because traditional schools cannot offer them a stimulating enough environment. There is also a group of students who struggle academically and who are being homeschooled because they cannot keep pace with those in traditional schools. Other homeschooling children fall in the group between these extremes. They include students who are highly gifted in one area, but struggle in other areas. These could be students who are highly capable in mathematics, but struggle with languages.

6.3.2 Special Needs

Some HBL families homeschool because their children have special needs. These include children diagnosed with autism, Asperger’s Syndrome, anxiety, depression, and physical illness. Some participants in the study being reported here indicated that their children can be considered as having ‘special needs’ or learning difficulties, and indicated that this is the reason why they started homeschooling. Homeschool support leaders are thus aware of the demands of special-needs homeschooling families. On this,
one participant said: “I know how hard it is!” Another commented as follows about her family:

My son, with the Aspergers, I just know that homeschooling is right for him. If he would have been in the school system, he would have been really, really destroyed. My daughter was so very, very anxious, and you wouldn’t know that now, she is teaching Drama and I don’t believe that would have happened if she stayed in the school system. She would just remained a really shy, withdrawn child, that would not ever venture out there, they just get too many knock-backs.

On this, it appears as if many families do not plan initially to homeschool. Rather, circumstances outside their control force them to keep their children at home. These circumstances may relate to such problems as slow progress at school, or not being healthy enough to start school. Parents of such children may feel unprepared, unequipped and even emotionally unwilling for the task ahead of them, and need curriculum guidance and support.

The participants claimed that attending homeschool support groups or co-ops provide challenges for these families. It may be physically demanding on the children and the mother, and for some it may be too difficult to do. Also, because parents acting as official carers are required by law in WA to stay with their children, a parent-teacher may not leave two children in different classes or activities of co-ops or social groups.

This group of homeschoolers needs to have access to educational services. On this, some of the participants also mentioned that it is unfair that special-needs children in public or private schools get access to educational psychologists and speech-language pathologists, but special-needs homeschooling children cannot gain access to these services. The establishment of a system similar to the School Dental system that operates in WA was suggested to rectify the situation.
6.3.3 Challenges

Some families within the homeschool community face additional challenges. Although they may not necessarily look towards the support organisations for help, it is claimed by the participants that smaller groups and individuals may reach out to them. Additional challenges include those arising for parents with disabilities or life threatening diseases (e.g. cancer) and single-parent homeschooling families who may have special-needs children. One participant described two regular-attending families of which the fathers are the carers of mothers in wheelchairs. Also, some families prefer to homeschool in order to have quality time as a family in a situation where one of the parents is seriously ill.

6.4 ISSUES RELATED TO THE NATURE OF THE PARENTS

The fourth theme generated regarding ‘various characteristics of HBL community’ that faces HBL support organisations in supporting the HBL community in WA, is ‘the nature of the parents’.

The participants perceive homeschooling parents as being diverse in their abilities and hold that support for them cannot be targeted in a single way. In the case of the study being reported here, while the participants included trained and experienced teachers, or were working in professional jobs before commencing homeschooling, they claimed that this is not be the case for the entire homeschool parent population. Also, they claimed that the homeschool population differs in abilities in using computers, the internet, and social media, and in dealing with such content-dense documents as curriculum and legal works. Furthermore, it is held that some parents are cautious about the use of computers, the internet and social media and limit their own, and also their children’s exposure to them.
HBLN committee members also tend to be concerned about the level of IT literacy amongst some of their members. They put in great effort to place as much information as possible on their website and provide electronic/internet resources for the HBLN community, but are well aware that this information does not always reach those most in need, as the skills are not there to access these resources. As one participant stated, “there are fantastic resources on line, but you need to have the skills to find them”. In the past, they tried to run webinars and live discussion groups, but discovered that some members of the home-education community were not sufficiently IT literate.

HBLN identifies resources for the HBL community and makes them aware of these resources. However, it is up to the individual families to gain access and use them. At one stage HBLN wanted to run a workshop to educate the members about this, but when they put it to the community, there was not a lot of interest. On this, one HBLN leader declared: “we do not know how to fix that”.

6.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed the first area of concern, namely issues of concern related to the various characteristics of the HBL community in WA. In the next chapter, Chapter Seven, the second area of concern that HBL support-organisation leaders face, namely, a group of issues related to various State authorities to whom they have to pay attention, is discussed.
CHAPTER 7
THE CONCERNS OF LEADERS OF HBL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS IN WA RELATED TO VARIOUS STATE AUTHORITIES

This chapter addresses the aim of the study reported in this thesis by presenting an analysis of the second area of concern to home-based learning (HBL) support-organisation leaders in Western Australia (WA) in carrying out their functions. This area of concern relates to various State authorities to whom they have to pay attention. On this, six themes were generated, namely, ‘scepticism towards authorities’, ‘national and State legislation’, ‘the Department of Education in WA’, ‘moderators’, ‘insurance’ and ‘financial support’. Each of these themes will now be considered in turn.

7.1 ISSUES RELATED TO SCEPTICISM TOWARDS AUTHORITIES

The first theme generated regarding ‘various State authorities’ is ‘scepticism toward authorities’. According to HBL support-organisations leaders the HBL community in WA has a general scepticism towards authority and the political environment. It seems as if most homeschool support leaders believe they cannot trust any government of the day to have their best interest at heart. Indeed, homeschoolers as a community state that they tend to be wary of government interference in the education of their children. On this, one of the participants stated: “Politicians may pick on homeschoolers … I don’t trust the government at this point. We can have all of our funding taken off us because our kids aren’t in school.”

7.2 ISSUES RELATED TO NATIONAL AND STATE LEGISLATION

The second theme of issue of concern that HBL support-organisation leaders have to deal with regarding how the HBL community which relates to various State authorities, will now be discussed. This theme relates to concerns regarding national and State legislation.
The political climate in Australia and how legislation can affect the HBL community are on-going concerns for homeschoolers and create a feeling of uncertainty and insecurity amongst them. The HBL support-group leaders interviewed tend to be concerned that future State governments may change the Education Act or bring new legislation that will affect the legality of HBL, have negative tax implications for homeschoolers, limit their access to adult training opportunities, or impose untenable health and safety regulations on them. There can also be uncertainty about the impact of such changes on different groupings within the HBL community and which guidelines they, as HBL support leaders, should propagate amongst the HBL community. On this, one of the participants stressed that “there is a lot of legal stuff that we have to follow”.

Over the last few years, changes in legislation around occupational health and safety, legal liability, and workers compensation, have had a serious impact on the homeschool community in WA. Changes in legislation have led to insurance matters becoming a big issue for the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN). In particular, organisers of homeschool outings and activities have to ensure that they meet legal responsibilities. The HBLN committee tries to make members and smaller groups aware of the legal issues and the committee members try to put sufficient structures in place to protect them.

HBLN makes insurance available to members organising and attending activities, but in doing so they have had to increase their membership fees to cover cost. Also, insurance companies require that health and safety checks be conducted and that forms be filled in. This adds to the amount of administration that organisers have to undertake. For example, if an organiser wants to hire a hall for an activity, he/she has to do a health and safety check on the hall, register the event with HBLN, and fill out forms. Many people consider this checking and form-filling to be really difficult and are not prepared to do
Thus, they either proceed without procuring insurance, or they do not organise the event. The HBLN committee is also concerned that there are many HBL groups that are not insured and, thus, homeschoolers who are not protected. HBLN went to much trouble to find the best insurance for HBL groups in WA, but still many individuals and groups do not make use of the opportunity they have provided.

Two other large homeschool support groups indicated that they have their own insurance independently of HBLN. Indeed, there are various HBL groups in WA not affiliated with HBLN that are organising excursions without insurance. Reasons for not insuring include a view that the activities are considered low risk, or that the places visited, such as museums, Scitech (a science park), and the ice-rink, have their own insurance. They also consider it “too expensive to pay insurance”, and “too much hassle to organise and administrate insurance”.

The HBLN leaders are aware that some members of the HBL community perceive that the emphasis they put on insurance is a way of trying to change the HBL community from, as one of them put it, “one of unregulated people who basically meet their needs in whatever way they deemed necessary, to an over-regulated community”. The community perceives this as something “that HBLN has done, while in fact it has nothing to do with HBLN initiative, but rather as a result of changes in law.”

Another legislative change that has influenced the homeschooling community came into effect at the beginning of 2014. This legislation dealt with child-care payment and Centrelink, which is the Australian Government agency responsible for the delivering of a wide range of services and unemployment benefits to Australians who find themselves on a low income, or without an income. This legislation requires that children over the age of 16 be registered in an officially recognised educational programme to continue to get Family Tax Benefit A, which is a payment low income parents receive to help with
the cost of raising children. Although most homeschoolers state that they have no problem receiving the funding for their 16 year old children, some say they lost their payment and had to renegotiate with Centrelink.

The Centrelink personnel with whom they dealt did not consider home-education to be a recognised educational course. In WA, homeschool parents register with the Department of Education as home-educators, and as such, their children are eligible for the Family Tax Benefit A payment if they satisfy the income test. Although this issue is really between the individual family and Centrelink, HBLN did inform its members about the issue and helped individual families by providing them with the necessary information to take to Centrelink. Nevertheless, the participants indicated that dealing with Centrelink is an on-going and problematic issue for the HBL community in WA.

The HBL support-organisation leaders are concerned that if they become involved with legislative issues and speaking up, they may be considered to be interfering and “overstepping the line”. They do want to support the HBL community. As one participant explained,

(We) do not want to overplay our hand and then hurt the HBL community. We are sitting on a very fine line when all around Australia and all around the world governments are cutting/canning homeschooling. We do not want that to happen here. We want to protect the right to home schooling.

Another participant expounded that “it is wonderful that we have the choice to do what we want with our child and their education, and that is very important. I do not want somebody to take it the wrong way and put more restrictions on us.”
7.3 ISSUES SPECIFICALLY RELATED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN WA

The third theme of issue of concern regarding ‘various State authorities’ that HBL support-organisation leaders raised is ‘the Department of Education’. Concerns regarding the Department of Education in WA, will now be discussed. On this, three sub-themes were generated. The first is concerned with the working relationship between the HBL community and the Department of Education in WA, the second with statistics on registered homeschoolers, and the third with unregistered homeschoolers. Each of these sub-themes will be considered in turn. However, before doing so, the relationship between the HBL community and the Department of Education in WA will be explained.

The *School Education Act 1999* provides educational choice for parents in WA. Parents can choose to register as home-educators and thereby assume responsibility for the education of their children at home during the compulsory years of schooling. These parents are issued with a ‘certificate of registration’ as the child's home-educators. Under the *School Education Act 1999*, the Department of Education is responsible for reporting periodically on the home-education program. The Director General has delegated responsibility for home-education evaluation to the Regional Executive Director in each education office within the State. Regional Executive Directors appoint home-education moderators who meet with the home-educators to monitor the educational program being provided for each child. Each registered home-education family has an evaluation meeting at least once a year. The moderator prepares an evaluation report for the Regional Executive Director about the program and the child's progress based on evidence provided by home-educator.
The *School Education Act 1999* provides for sanctions to ensure the effective operation of home-education programs, just as there are checks in place for school programs. If the Regional Executive Director has a concern about a child’s program or educational progress in home-education, steps can be taken. The moderator provides appropriate advice to home-educators to facilitate addressing the problems before the situation is re-evaluated. In most instances this approach is effective and the registration is maintained. However, a decision to cancel registration may be taken for several reasons, as set out in the *School Education Act 1999*. One of the reasons is that the educational progress of the child is not satisfactory. The other reason has to do with the home-educator’s dereliction of responsibility to liaise with the Department of Education regarding changes in the homeschooling situation and the arrangement of evaluation meetings.

The home-educator may seek a review of a decision to cancel registration through a submission to the Minister for Education, who will refer the appeal to a Home Education Advisory Panel to report on the matter.

The Home Education Advisory Panel (Department of Education, 2014) is meant to consist of a small and impartial group of members who have the skills and insights to offer quality, impartial advice to the Minister for Education about the case under review. The panel has to represent a balance of community and departmental perspectives. However, despite HBL support-organisation leaders, and more specifically HBLN leaders, being well-qualified for serving on this panel, they have not been included when forming the panel.

The home-educator can bring someone along to the Panel meeting to provide support or, if necessary, represent the home-educator. HBLN may offer to supply someone if asked and if a volunteer is available. However, HBLN are restricted by lack of finances and volunteers.
The three sub-themes of issues of concern related to the Department of Education of WA that confront HBL support-organisation leaders, will now be considered in turn.

7.3.1  The Working Relationship between the HBL Community and the Department of Education of WA

The first sub-theme generated in relation to ‘the Department of Education’ has to do with the working relationship between the HBL community and the Department of Education of WA. There are no official connections between the Department of Education and the HBL community as a group. The moderators visit registered homeschooling families and deal with each family on an individual basis, but the Department of Education does not deal with the HBL community as a group.

HBLN and some other HBL support groups have tried to establish a working relationship with the Department of Education. As the only inclusive HBL support organisation in WA, HBLN is regarded as being the best positioned to be the organisation with which the Department of Education can liaise. The main reason why HBLN wants to have a good working relationship with the Department of Education is so that the leaders at the Department of Education and the moderators can have a better understanding and appreciation of the intentions, diversity, and complexity found in homeschooling, and also of the HBL community in WA. Such an improved understanding and acceptance, it is held, would aid in developing appropriate assessment criteria for HBL families and could meet the requirements of both the Department of Education and the HBL families. A good working relationship between the Department of Education and HBLN, it is held, would also put HBLN in a position to communicate changes at the Department of Education to the HBL community. This, it is argued, would lessen the stress experienced in the HBL community, enabling homeschooling families to focus on the task of educating their children.
Historically, the relationship between the HBL community and the Department of Education of WA has been tense. There seems to have been an unnecessary gap, as one member put it, “between them and us”. Since 2011, however, the relationship has improved. Currently the HBLN committee organises a meeting with the Department of Education once a year. Although the HBLN committee members are happy with the current relationship with the Department, they are aware that the relationship is still mostly informal and could change when new leadership takes over at the Department, or if there is a change in government attitudes.

One of the reasons why the relationship between the Department of Education and the HBL community has been problematic is because the HBL community perceives that the Department looks at them through ‘school-eyes’. The Department of Education, they claim, wants to measure the outcomes of HBL against the same curriculum requirements they use to evaluate public and private schools. Participants also complained that, during visits, the moderators ask questions regarding socialisation and whether the students ‘like’ what they do or find it ‘boring’. They questioned whether these questions are ever asked of students at school. Therefore the evaluation criteria used by the Department of Education when dealing with the HBL families are seen as being ‘unequal’ compared to that used to evaluate school students.

At the time the study was conducted, the relationship between the Department of Education and the homeschool community in WA was considered to be better than in the past. Participants indicated that problems with the Department of Education were “not too serious”. They were all aware of, and vocal about, the fact that “the WA situation is much better than in other Australian States”. Yet, the HBL support-group leaders stated that the Department of Education personnel do not understand the complexity of homeschooling.
The working relationship between the Department of Education and the HBL community is not viewed as satisfactory by the HBL leaders. They would like to see an improved relationship where they can give constructive input. However, even if the Department of Education established a more formal relationship between themselves and the HBL community, and specifically with HBLN, limited finances and the availability of volunteers could limit the extent to which HBL leaders, and specifically HBLN committee members, might be available to partake.

7.3.2 Statistics on Registered Homeschoolers

The second sub-theme of issue of concern related to the Department of Education of WA generated has to do with the statistics on registered homeschoolers as kept by the Department of Education of WA. Two properties were generated under the theme ‘statistics on registered homeschoolers’, namely ‘unavailability of data’ and ‘inclusion of school-refusers. Each of these properties will now be considered in turn.

The first property generated regarding ‘statistics on registered homeschoolers’ is the unavailability of data on the number of homeschoolers registered with the Department of Education. As indicated earlier in this thesis in Section 6.1.1, it is very difficult to get specific data from the Department of Education about the number of registered homeschoolers. When, in the past, HBLN asked the Department of Education about the number of homeschoolers registered with them, the Department indicated that they either did not keep that information or, could not disclose it due to privacy issues. HBLN committee members cannot understand why the Department of Education does not have specific numbers of home-educators per region. This data could be made available to homeschool support organisations and be of use to them.

The second property generated regarding ‘statistics on registered homeschoolers’ is ‘school-refusers. HBL support-group leaders are concerned by the inclusion of school-
refusers or school-evaders with the data on homeschoolers kept by the Department of Education. Families who are school-refusers are currently counted as homeschoolers although these students are actually not being home-educated. Typically they are high-school age students who refuse to go to school for various reasons. These school-refusers are automatically classed as home-educated students by the Department of Education. The result is that a reasonable portion of the official home-education figures are made up of school-refusers. According to a participant, close to 50% of the students that the Department of Education considers to be home-educated, are actually school-refusers. HBLN desperately tries to get the HBL numbers separated from school-refusers because, as one member put it, “they have nothing to do with us. They give us a bad name”. These students are not only refusing to go to school, they also refuse home-education. They regularly receive warnings, are examined by review panels and can be deregistered. The concern of HBLN is that combining the statistics may inappropriately inform changes on the Education Act and have a negative influence on the homeschooling community.

7.3.3 Unregistered Homeschoolers

The third sub-theme of issues of concern relating to the Department of Education of WA that was generated relates to homeschoolers who do not register with the Department of Education of WA. Despite the current requirement that homeschoolers register with the Department, the general perception of participants in the study being reported here is that there are many families who do not register. All indicated that, while they might have had reservations about registering with the Department, they are currently registered. They argue that being registered enables them to voice their opinions when necessary. However, support-group leaders do not require of their members that they be registered. Also, they are not aware of many unregistered
homeschoolers in WA; “We tell them, as far as government is concerned, you must register with them, but it is your responsibility”, one participant explained.

Although most of the HBL support-group leaders interviewed do not want to draw attention to the unregistered home-educators and want their privacy to be respected, one participant stated that “government needs to be aware of the great number of unregistered people”. She held that it is necessary to identify why some home-educators do not want to register with the Department of Education, what scares them, and why the current situation is not working for them.

Participants are of the view that the unregistered home-educators are concerned that the government does not understand ‘natural learners’, may become prescriptive about content, and prohibit the use of certain curricula and learning materials currently used, particularly that which is Christian-based. Some home-educators, especially those who see their children as natural learners, do not want to comply with the curriculum requirements of the Department of Education. As one participant explained: “The National Curriculum is so directed, for a natural learner it is very hard.” Another participant outlined a perceived danger of the requirement to register being that the government wants to take “control over what you are teaching your children, whether it is curriculum, or methodology, or resources”.

7.4 ISSUES RELATED TO THE MODERATORS

The fourth theme of issue of concern generated regarding how the HBL community relates to various State authorities, will now be discussed. This theme relates to concerns regarding moderators.

Issues of concern regarding moderators are serious for many HBL support-group leaders. According to them, some homeschoolers see their relationship with moderators
as the foremost concern the HBL community faces. It is held that the relationship between moderators and homeschoolers has been a serious issue for as long as participants can remember. This concurs with findings from document analysis of early newsletters of HBLN. However, it is held by the participants, that many homeschoolers are happy with their relationship with the moderators.

Moderators are appointed by the executive officer in each of the eight regional education offices of the Department of Education in WA. As explained previously in Section 7.3, in accordance with the School Education Act 1999, the Director General of the Department of Education delegated responsibility for home-education evaluation to the Regional Executive Director in each regional education office. The regional chief executive officers appoint persons they consider to have appropriate experience, skills and qualifications to enable them to effectively evaluate the educational programmes of homeschooled children and evaluate their educational progress. The appointed persons are provided with a certificate stating that they are appointed for these purposes.

The home-education moderators meet with the home-educators and monitor the educational program being provided for each child. An evaluation meeting takes place at least once a year. The first meeting takes place within three months of the registration date. These meetings take place at the home-educator’s home or another appropriate venue at a time that is mutually convenient.

Moderators prepare an evaluation report for the Regional Executive Director about the program and the child's progress based on evidence provided by the home-educator. The home-educator also receives a copy of the report. The report might include an evaluation of the program, an indication of the child’s achievement, areas needing attention, suggestions for strategies, and resources to help the child. Answers to questions asked at the meeting, as well as links to the Curriculum Framework and the
WA Curriculum and Assessment Outline, may also be included in the report. If the Regional Executive Director has a concern about a child’s program or educational progress in home-education, the moderator provides appropriate advice to the home-educator to allow the problems to be addressed before the situation is re-evaluated.

The relationship between the moderators and the homeschoolers has always been a major concern for the HBL community. At the time when the study being reported in this thesis was being conducted, the relationship between HBLN and the moderators in general, was considered to be better than it was in the past. The main reason given for the improvement is the fact that the HBLN committee has made an effort to establish talks and maintain open communication channels. The HBLN committee also provided HBL families with information to help them to prepare for home visits. However, despite the efforts of HBLN to improve the relationship between the moderators and the HBL community, it is still considered to be strained and the participants are sceptical about whether it will ever be satisfactory to all parties. As one participant explained: “I think it (the main concern) is always where the relationship between the moderators and homeschoolers is going. I think that is always going to be (the main concern).”

Three sub-themes of concerns to do with moderators were generated. These sub-themes generated are ‘moderators not understanding homeschoolers’, ‘evaluation standards used by moderators’ and ‘moderators misinform home-educators’. Each of these sub-themes will be considered in turn.

7.4.1 Moderators Not Understanding Homeschoolers

The participants in the study being reported here argued that moderators tend to have a school background which is quite different to the way homeschoolers approach learning. This makes it difficult for them to understand homeschoolers. Participants also indicated that moderators have little experience about homeschooling. As a result, it is
held that some HBL families may choose to stay unregistered due to the tension created between the moderator’s rigid ‘school expectations’ and the HBL family’s educational motivation and practice. Other families feel bullied into sending their children to school after meeting with the moderator or having their registration cancelled.

7.4.2 Evaluation Standards Used by Moderators

In evaluating home school progress, it is claimed, moderators vary in their approaches. As there is no uniform set of criteria for them to use, there are no consistency in the criteria applied by the different moderators. Further, some evaluation criteria used were considered to be inappropriate or unfair by the participants. Another concern is the fact that evaluation standards and documentation handed out by moderators are drawn up by them on an individual basis.

7.4.2.1 Varying Evaluation Criteria

It is the experience of participants that different moderators can apply different standards when evaluating the educational progress of homeschool families. There is no standard set of criteria with which all homeschoolers have to comply. Some moderators use no, or very little, formal standards when evaluating homeschool progress, while other moderators use strict, written guidelines. The participants indicated that the use of such different evaluation approaches by moderators makes it difficult for an individual HBL family to record its homeschool activities and prepare for subsequent visits. One family may be regarded as highly effective by one moderator, but not reaching the benchmark the next year when visited and evaluated by another moderator. On this, the participants held that just as each homeschool family is unique, so each moderator has a unique personality. Thus, they argued for the introduction of a more uniform system of evaluation where all homeschoolers in WA would receive the same documentation from all moderators.
7.4.2.2 Inappropriate/Unfair Standards

It was claimed that during home visits, moderators asked questions considered inappropriate by parents and/or students. This included questions about the social skills of the students and whether they consider their work as being boring. Participants indicated that they considered these questions to be unfair since, as one of them put it, “public and private schools only measure attendance and academics, but for homeschoolers they want to measure all these other things”.

7.4.2.3 Evaluation Criteria and Documents Set by Individual Moderators

The participants argued that moderators set their own evaluation standards, guidelines and documents which they hand to the homeschooling families on visit. The participants would like to see a uniform set of evaluation criteria and instruments developed in consultation with all stakeholders. They indicated that all moderators from different regional offices should have input into that document, along with HBL support organisations and parents. This, they held, would ensure that all homeschoolers would receive the same documentation irrespective of which regional office they fall under or who the moderator is.

7.4.3 Moderators Misinform Home-Educators

Participants argued that the moderators do not always have their facts correct and can sometimes generate fear amongst the homeschooling community. For example, one moderator gave wrong information regarding the transition of homeschooling children to university. This caused great anxiety in the homeschooling community and led to some parents placing their children in school.
7.5 ISSUES RELATED TO INSURANCE

‘Insurance’ is the fifth theme generated regarding of issue of concern that HBL support-organisation leaders have to deal with in the area of concern ‘various State authorities’. It is regarded as an important issue in the HBL community. Indeed, providing insurance for the HBL community in WA is one of the main functions of HBLN.

Issues related to insurance have to do with the clarity of procedures, and the amount of administration and expense involved with insuring HBL groups and activities. Obtaining the best and relevant insurance for HBL activities and excursions is considered to be a complicated and time-consuming process for which most actively-homeschooling parents do not have time. Some participants indicated that if more homeschoolers understood how insurance works, more co-ops and HBL resource centres would have been started up.

Administrating insurance procedures is time-consuming and complicated. This puts additional stress on time-poor HBL leaders. To ensure that activities are comprehensively covered under the relevant insurance policies, strict compliance to all the requirements of the policies is required, which often means that many different forms have to be filled in and safety checks need to be undertaken. Paying for the insurance also makes HBL activities more expensive and that needs to be passed on to the members. This happens in two ways, namely, through increased membership fees to HBL support organisations, or through an increase in cost of activities.

During the time the study being reported in this thesis was conducted, the HBL community in WA dealt with the issue of insurance in three ways. First, some groups used insurance provided by the largest HBL support organisation in WA, namely
HBLN. Secondly, a few groups chose to become incorporated and obtained their own insurance. Thirdly, many groups operated without insurance.

7.5.1 Insurance Under HBLN

In the early 2010s new legislation regarding public liability insurance came into effect that hit all small organisations, including HBLN. Many small service providers had to close down because they could not afford the public liability insurance. HBLN could not afford it either and, unfortunately had to temporarily stop running events.

The HBLN coordinator did intensive research on the issue and identified and procured affordable insurance. HBLN then resumed suspended events and also started running new ones. The insurance procured by HBLN is for its own protection and for those events or groups who have officially registered with HBLN. It is not provided as a personal insurance scheme.

Since the beginning of 2014, HBLN has provided Public Liability Insurance and Workers Compensation Insurance for organisers of home-education groups and events. This protects the HBLN committee, members and event organisers from third party actions where a third party e.g. a member of the public, might be killed or physically injured, or their property might be damaged due to the negligence of the HBLN committee, member or event organiser. This insurance policy covers liability, legal responsibility and accountability caused by event organisers, liability to event organisers who suffer injury whilst involved in organising an HBLN homeschooling event, and legal costs and expenses incurred when defending a claim. It also covers the legal liability of HBLN and its members (including children) while participating in HBLN activities within Australia in respect of personal injury and damage to property.
The insurance policy has some exclusion clauses. It does not include professional liability, accidents involving activities in high-risk sports, and accidents involving watercraft, mechanically propelled vehicles or registered motor vehicles covered by compulsory third party insurance. Therefore, HBLN members instructing home-education families in sporting activities must have their own insurance. Members instructing home-educating families who receive a payment for service, whether of monetary or in-kind value, are also not covered. HBLN also provides Workers Compensation Cover for members. This cover protects HBLN’s registered groups who employ workers against liability for work related injuries.

Parents are fully responsible for the safety and discipline of their own children and those in their care. It is required that children be supervised at all times. Parents also must take all necessary steps to ensure accidents do not happen. Supervision of children must always be by a specific, responsible adult who has agreed with the parents to take care of their children and who has agreed to abide by the HBLN Code of Conduct. ‘Signing in’ of children on the Event Attendance Register for an activity acts as proof of agreement with the HBLN Code of Conduct. HBLN does not provide child care at any of its activities unless specifically stated when advertising the event, in which case qualified people are employed to care for children.

It is argued by HBLN committee members that insurance involves a lot of administration and that the cover is only effective if the organisers comply with relevant government requirements and take reasonable precautions to prevent injury to person and damage to property. To be covered by the policy, members organising events or groups need to register the group or event with the HBLN coordinator prior to the meeting or event taking place. All leases, agreements or any other contract documents
requiring signatures must be forwarded to HBLN for approval prior to signing to ensure contractual and financial liabilities are approved by the insurer.

The event organisers and group leaders are also responsible for ensuring that venues used for events are suitable and safe. A risk assessment has to be undertaken prior to one-off events taking place, or on a regular basis for on-going events. Where an organiser or group feels that safety may be at risk due to the conditions of a premises, a letter should be written and a copy sent to the owner of the premises, outlining the situation and requesting immediate action to remedy the problem. A copy of the letter should be forwarded to HBLN.

HBLN strives to inform all HBL members of the risks involved with running activities without insurance. It also tries to make the administration of the insurance process as easy as possible for the members by providing all of the necessary forms on its website. Despite HBLN urging all organisers of co-ops where teachers are employed in classes, it is held that a significant number of groups have failed to register their group for inclusion in workers compensation insurance. This places a person paying teachers within these co-ops at serious personal financial risk of fines and loss of property if a dangerous event occurs.

### 7.5.2 Own Insurance

Another way in which HBL support organisations and HBL co-ops can deal with the issue of insurance, is to become an ‘incorporated entity’ and obtain their own insurance independently of HBLN. At least two specific groups in WA have taken up this option.

The HBL support-organisation leaders need expertise and time to obtain their own insurance. This is also costly in terms of its impact on membership fees and activity
costs. Furthermore, the organisation leaders have to handle the administration of the
insurance all on their own.

7.5.3 Groups Without Insurance

There is a large number of small groups that run activities and organise excursions
without insurance. Some people rebel against the ‘over-regulated society’ and trust that
no injuries or property losses will occur during the running of events by their home-
education group. Activities that are usually run by uninsured groups include such low-
risk activities as social meetings in a park and excursions to facilities that have their
own insurance, like museums and theatres.

7.6 ISSUES RELATED TO FINANCIAL SUPPORT

The last theme generated in the area of concern related to various State authorities that
HBL support organisations in WA face, is ‘financial support’. There is a perception that
lack of funds is a problem for HBL support organisations, for HBL service providers
and for some individual HBL families. It is claimed that the vast majority of HBL
families are single-income ones. The education of their children is not subsidised in the
same way as that of children in public or private schools. As a result, some families
cannot afford to pay for resources and activities beyond providing the bare basics.

Also, HBL support organisations such as HBLN, have to balance their income from
membership fees and event payments, with their expenditure, including paying for
insurance. The situation is intensified by the fact that as the HBL community is growing
in numbers and diversity, more money is needed to keep the organisation and
committee running. HBL service providers such as HBL co-operatives struggle to
provide an extended array of activities, while at the same time keeping the activities
affordable. This is held to be especially true when professional and expensive teachers are employed to facilitate activities.

There is also a view that HBL service provision is not a financially lucrative business in WA. The participants are not aware of anybody who makes a living of providing it. Most service providers are either homeschooling parents who do it for the benefit of their own children, retired persons doing it one or two days a week because they love working with children, or teachers who run classes mainly for the general public. Even local curriculum providers have to supplement their income in other ways. To provide an example of the unprofitability of services to the HBL community in WA, some participants referred to an enthusiastic lady who ran half-day and full-day classes for homeschoolers in the early 2010s. Parents could leave their children at these classes for a day without having to supervise them. Despite her great effort to make a success of this venture, she could not keep the classes affordable for the HBL community and create a liveable income for herself.

Some participants suggested that the government or the Department of Education should contribute financially to the homeschooling community. It is suggested that this could be done by either directly subsidising the HBL families or by contributing to HBL support organisations like HBLN. It was also proposed that government could subsidise service providers or provide venues for homeschool activities. For example, it was proposed that unused school buildings could serve as resource centres for the HBL community. Also, it was held that it is unfair that homeschoolers cannot claim GST on learning material, while schools in WA can do so.

Overall, however, members of the HBL community are divided on whether the government should financially support homeschooling families. They are aware that government is using taxpayers’ money to pay for the education of children in schools,
while it is not financially contributing to the education of children being homeschooled. Many would like to see homeschool families being financially supported or compensated by the government, but others fear that if they received any money from the government, the government would put restrictions on homeschoolers.

The following example was provided to illustrate the latter point. During 2014 a draft letter to the then Minister of Education and Training, Christopher Pyne, was circulated on social media amongst the HBL community. The writer of the letter was of the opinion that homeschool students should also be included in the educational funding available. He argued that at that stage, government schools were receiving $6 - 7 000 per primary school student and $10 - 11 000 per high-school student per year, and that homeschooling parents should also get some funding. He wanted to gauge the opinions of other members of the HBL community on this issue. His letter was rejected by many members of the HBL community. This was on two grounds. The first objection was that if the government, or the Department of Education, provided finances to homeschoolers, they might “put certain expectations and criteria on families” that the parents would not want. As one participant explained: “There’s a lot of fear that, as soon as there is any money from the government, the government can then put some restrictions on what homeschoolers should or should not do, e.g. standardised testing and NAPLAN.” Many homeschoolers, it is held, would rather go without funding and be free to choose to homeschool the way they want to, than receive money and have restrictions placed upon them.

The second objection was the concern that some parents might decide to homeschool with the wrong motive, namely, just to get the money. It was held that a financial allowance would be an incentive for some parents whose children are in the school
system and who never before considered homeschooling, to start homeschooling. The HBL support-group leaders interviewed are at one that this would be wrong.

Participants also referred to the annual supervising allowance that homeschooling families in New Zealand receive. In 2015, the New Zealand Ministry of Education paid $743 per year to families homeschooling one child. This amount is reduced for subsequent children. For the fourth and further children, families receive $372 per year. Although most would welcome a similar system in WA, they are aware that it might also come with ‘strings attached’.

7.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed of issues of concern regarding the second area of concern, namely ‘various State authorities’, raised by HBL support-organisation leaders in dealing with their functions. In the next chapter, Chapter 8, issues of concern falling in the third area of concern, namely ‘the practice of HBL’, is discussed.
CHAPTER 8
THE CONCERNS OF LEADERS OF HBL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS IN WA RELATED TO THE PRACTICE OF HOME-BASED LEARNING

This chapter addresses the aim of the study reported in this thesis by presenting an analysis of the third area of concern generated regarding issues of concern to home-based learning (HBL) support-organisation leaders in carrying out their functions. This area of concern is related to the practice of HBL in Western Australia (WA). On this, six themes were generated, namely ‘acceptance within non-homeschooling community’, ‘future pathways for HBL graduates’, ‘finance’, ‘venues’, ‘emotional load and burnout’ and ‘equal access to services’. Each of these themes will now be considered in turn.

8.1 ISSUES RELATED TO THE ACCEPTANCE OF HOMESCHOOLING IN THE NON-HOMESCHOOLING COMMUNITY

The first theme generated regarding issues of concern related to the practice of HBL that faces HBL support organisations in WA has to do with the acceptance of homeschooling in the non-homeschooling community. At the time the study reported in this thesis was being conducted, there was a view amongst the HBL community in WA that, HBL did not have a good image within the non-homeschooling community in the past, it was getting more acceptance.

The perception amongst the HBL support-organisation leaders is that members of the non-homeschooling community can be negative about homeschooling when they have not been exposed to home-education and therefore do not understand this approach to education. They also hold that negative media coverage can contribute to negative perceptions.

Regarding the theme ‘acceptance within non-homeschooling community’, five sub-themes were generated, namely ‘acceptance within non-homeschooling community’,
were discussed under five sub-themes, namely ‘general public’, ‘school principals and teachers’, ‘professionals’, ‘academic quality of HBL members’ and ‘addressing issues of acceptance’. Each of these sub-themes will now be considered in turn.

8.1.1 Perception by the General Public of Homeschoolers

It is an issue for HBL leaders that some members of the general public view them as “weirdoes” and marginalised. They are concerned as, in the words of one participant, they see themselves as “actually quite normal members of society”. At the same time, they agree that the situation is much better than it was 20 years ago when there were fewer homeschoolers in WA.

8.1.2 Perception by School Principals and Teachers of Homeschoolers

It is an issue for HBL leaders that, from their experience, most school principals and teachers have a negative view of HBL. As one participant explained:

Many teachers take offence when homeschooling gets mentioned. They feel that homeschoolers insult the system. But that is not the case. I make decisions for my children, based on their needs. It is not about anyone else, it is about my children. It is just a choice. Homeschooling is not for everyone, that’s for sure!

It is held that some school principals and teachers do not appreciate that home-education is a legal form of education in WA, and that their perceptions are based on no or very limited knowledge and experience of homeschooling as educational approach.

8.1.3 Perception by Professionals of Homeschoolers

It is an issue for HBL support-organisation leaders that they consider that most professional people have a negative view of HBL. They find that the group of people most negative about HBL consists of university-trained professionals. They believe that this negative view stems from, as one participant explained, the fact that professionals are “indoctrinated into believing that HBL parents cannot provide a rigid learning
experience” like the one they had to go through in order to reach university. Therefore, it is held, that these professionals are of the opinion that “HBL parents are doing their children a disservice”. As one participant explained: “I never had a good conversation with a person who had a degree who thinks home-education is a good idea except those who are home-educators themselves.” The one exception she identified is certain lecturers at universities, who are “definitely positive about homeschooled students because they are self-motivated, can think for themselves and are goal-orientated”. She also referred to research done in the USA that confirmed this. It is also held that TAFE professionals are more accepting of home-education than other professionals.

8.1.4 Misconceptions Regarding the Academic Quality of HBL Members

It is an issue for HBL support-organisation leaders that there exists a misconception within the non-homeschooling community that homeschoolers are academically weak. They point out that, despite some HBL students leaving school because they have not been performing well, there are many others who perform very well academically. Many HBL students go on to university. Also, there are a number of HBL students in WA who are part of MENSA Australia. It was also pointed out that the 2010 Beazley medal recipient, Michael Taran, was a homeschooled student. The Beazley Medal is an award made by the Curriculum Council of WA to the year-twelve secondary student with the highest Curriculum Council award score. The award is the highest profile and most prestigious academic award for secondary school students in WA. Michael Taran was homeschooled until he entered Perth Modern School for Years 11 and 12. He later went on to study medicine at The University of Western Australia.

The interviewees held that when parents only start homeschooling at the end of primary school years, they cannot be blamed for poor academic results at that point. As one participant put it, “the finger should also be pointed at the school where the children
spent their first school years before pointing it to the home”. She stated further that, just as in the ‘regular’ school situation where there are those students who are academically strong and those who are slower learners, so also is the case in the homeschool community.

8.1.5 Addressing Issues of Acceptance

The HBL community claims that currently it is trying to improve its rapport with the non-homeschooling community in WA. This is done in two ways. First, the HBL community has increased its community involvement by reaching out to, and serving the community. For example some groups sing at nursing homes or help with community clean-up days. Secondly, it tries to ensure that the media have the correct facts when reporting on HBL in general, or on specific HBL families. This is done by directing journalists to such leaders in the HBL community as the coordinator of HBLN and the leader of Homeschool WA.

8.2 ISSUES RELATED TO FUTURE PATHWAYS OF HBL GRADUATES

The second theme generated in the area of concern ‘the practice of HBL’, is ‘future pathways of HBL graduates’. On this, two sub-themes were generated, namely, ‘pathways available’ and ‘unawareness of pathways’. HBL support-organisation leaders indicated that there are issues amongst the HBL community regarding the university-entry pathways for HBL students. These students do not receive an official document at the end of their time of homeschooling to indicate what they have accomplished. As a result, they cannot apply for after-school educational opportunities in the same way as students who have attended a public or private school can. Examples of such educational opportunities are university education and some in-service workforce training. It is held that this creates issues for parents.
Despite the availability of different pathways, many parents are not aware of the different options available to HBL students. The participants interviewed held that parents are especially concerned about how their children can gain entry to university. It is claimed that the situation is exaggerated by some of the moderators who do not have accurate information and create fear amongst the HBL community. In particular, it is held that for years insufficient information was available to HBL families and every student had to be dealt with and advised on an individual basis. HBLN now can provide help as it has engaged in research on the options available in WA.

HBL students have a variety of options available to them on completion of homeschooling. Like others, they can enter the workforce directly. Indeed, many HBL students start working on a part-time basis during the years they are being homeschooled and then go into full-time employment when they reach a certain age or a certain point in their studies. Students can also do vocational training. Another group of HBL students aim to enter university.

Homeschool graduates cannot gain university entry in the same way as students attending public and private schools in WA. In WA, children attending a ‘regular’ school sit the WACE (Western Australian Certificate of Education) exams. From their results an Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is calculated. An ATAR is the primary criterion used to gain entry into most undergraduate university programs in Australia. In the past, HBL students were allowed to sit the State-wide Year 12 examinations as independent students, but during the 2010s the curriculum changed. Now, the results of Year 11 and 12 courses are taken into account before students can be awarded a WACE Certificate. During the time the study being reported here was conducted, HBL students in WA could not sit the WACE examinations and therefore
could not apply for university courses subject to ATAR requirements, in the normal way.

Current pathways to university for HBL students in WA include doing Years 11 and 12 at school, through distance education, through Technical and Further Education institutes (TAFE) or in a private college; approaching university faculty members directly with a portfolio and trying to persuade them of one’s eligibility; enrolling in Open Learning University (available for students aged 11+) and working towards a degree; or through studying ‘bridging’ subjects. Students can also chose to work through Certificate 1-4 at TAFE or accredited colleges.

It is held that many HBL parents choose to send their children to school for Year 11 and 12 in order to complete the WACE and enter university. The school can be a public school, a private school or a senior college like Cyril Jackson Senior Campus and Tuart College, that cater for students older than 16 years of age and offer a range of Year 11 and 12 courses in an environment that fosters adult learning.

Some HBL parents choose to use distance education providers to enable their Year 12 children to sit the WACE examination and get an ATAR. Different distance education providers are available for Years 11 and 12. The Schools of Isolated and Distance Education (SIDE) is the centre of distance and online learning within the Department of Education of WA. SIDE offers a variety of courses, vocational education and training (VET) and endorsed programs to provide students with individualised pathways that best meet their future plans. Private distance education schools that enable HBL students to get an ATAR include Swan Christian College (Swanonline). In the past, students could finish Year 12 by studying the Accelerated Christian Education curriculum (ACE) provided by Australian Christian College Southlands. This was one
of the largest non-government distance education providers until the early 2010s, but currently it only offers distance education up to Year 10 level.

In addition to the options already mentioned, there are three other pathways available to HBL students to gain university entrance. First, HBL students can chose to work through Certificate 1 to 4 at TAFE. The government-owned and operated TAFE institutes are located throughout WA and offer a wide range of pathways to university programs, including specific bridging programmes. Students can enrol at TAFE from the age of 15. HBL students can, as already pointed out, also gain entry to university by approaching a university faculty directly with a portfolio. Thirdly, they can enrol in Open Learning University (available for students aged 11+) and work to qualifications that would give them access to university.

Making the choice amongst the different pathways is difficult. Also, despite having these choices, it is held that some HBL parents can still be anxious. For example, sending children to school for Year 11 and 12, is not an acceptable or viable option for some. Also, despite having alternatives to completing Years 11 and 12 at a school, many HBL families are not aware of them.

HBLN committee members get frequent inquiries about transition from senior high school to university. They seek to allay fears on this by providing the correct information to the HBL community. On this, the coordinator of HBLN took it on herself to do research on all of the pathways. Since 2014, she has provided extensive information on the HBLN website. HBLN also organised the first homeschool career expo in 2014 and plans to make it an annual event. At the career expo different further-education providers, including universities, TAFE, and senior colleges, presented their study possibilities.
8.3 ISSUES RELATED TO FINANCES

The third theme generated regarding ‘the practice of HBL’ is ‘finances’. Financial challenges can be considered under five sub-themes, namely, ‘restricted family income’, ‘affordability of activities’, ‘relevance of fundraising’, ‘access to grants’ and ‘providing HBL services not being a lucrative business’. Each of these sub-themes will now be considered in turn.

8.3.1 Restricted Family Income

The first sub-theme generated regarding the theme ‘finance’, is ‘restricted family income’. It is held that HBL households usually have fairly limited finances. Since the practice of HBL involves parent-led education, many families are single-income families. HBL households thus have less money than double-income households and have to manage their money very prudently. According to some participants, the cost of homeschooling is an issue that prevents some families from providing a wide range of outside-the-home activities. These parents are grateful for the choice to home-educate and are aware that they have to be able to fund themselves.

8.3.2 Affordability of Activities

The second sub-theme generated regarding the theme ‘finance’, is ‘affordability of activities’. The cost of outside-the-home activities is claimed by some participants to be an issue, especially for those with many children. The cost of activities depends on those who run them. Activities run by homeschooling parents themselves are usually either free, or fees are only charged to cover expenses. Specialised classes and activities run by professionals are usually more expensive.
8.3.3 Relevance of Fundraising

The third sub-theme generated regarding the theme ‘finance’, is ‘relevance of fundraising’. Participants indicated that various fundraising activities have been considered in the past as ways to raise money to subsidise homeschooling activities and support groups. However, fundraising remains an issue for HBL support-groups leaders. While some groups do have limited fundraising activities, involving all members of the homeschooling families, the general consensus is that the effort put in by a large number of people often outweighs the value of the income raised. Also, the responsibility for organising and running the fundraising activity usually falls on the shoulders of the already busy and time-poor parents.

8.3.4 Access to Grants

The fourth sub-theme generated regarding the theme ‘finance’, is ‘access to grants’. The HBL support-group leaders perceive that while they often apply for grants to pay for or subsidise HBL activities, they are usually unsuccessful. Different HBL support organisations in WA, including HBLN, applied for grants in the years before the study reported here was conducted. Although they went to great lengths to motivate their applications, they were not successful. The impression created amongst the participants is that the organisations that award the grants do not consider the support of home-educating families to be as important as most other causes. As one support-group leader explained:

The fact that we home-educate counts against us. We are not as exciting (as some other causes). When giving grant money out, you are earning more Brownie points or advertising points if you are giving money to financially disadvantaged mums and help support them, than when you give to financially disadvantaged home-educators because they are financially disadvantaged because they chose to home-educate.
During the time the study reported here was conducted, the HBL support-group leaders were also aware that there was not a lot of money available for grants. On this one participant stated that “with the current financial climate, funding is cut from absolutely everything.”

8.3.5 Providing HBL Services is Not a Lucrative Business

The fifth sub-theme generated regarding the theme ‘finance’, is ‘providing HBL services is not a lucrative business’. The HBL support-group leaders do not perceive the provision of HBL services to be a financially feasible business and as a viable way to finance or subsidise the support of HBL activities. They explained that they are not aware of any person in WA who has made a living from providing services to homeschoolers. It is held that HBL service providers are either homeschooling parents providing services mainly for the benefit of their own children, retired people who love working with children, or teachers who run activities for the general public.

8.4 ISSUES RELATED TO VENUES FOR HOMESCHOOL ACTIVITIES AND MEETINGS

The fourth theme generated regarding issues of concern related to the practice of HBL that HBL support organisations in WA face, is ‘venues’. Currently HBL support groups in WA use venues like private homes, library rooms, church buildings, scout halls, community centres, sport centres and campsites for their activities. Finding appropriate and cost-effective venues for HBL activities is difficult and time-consuming. One of the participants in the study reported here explained how the HBL support groups with which she is involved started out in a member’s private home in the late 1990s. As the group grew, the home became too small and moved to a church facility. The group kept growing and a campsite was acquired for the weekly activity day. In 2013 the group had to cease taking in new members when the campsite reached full capacity and a larger
venue could not be found. Sub-themes generated regarding ‘venues’ were ‘availability’, ‘cost’, ‘storing space’, ‘no permanent central resource centre’ and ‘safety’. Each of these sub-themes will now be considered in turn.

8.4.1 The Availability of Appropriate Venues

It is held that HBL support-group leaders find it difficult to find appropriate venues for running HBL activities. When identifying an appropriate venue, the leaders need to consider the number of people attending the group activities, the different types of activities being organised, and the needs of students with disabilities.

The nature of the activities to be run determines the type of venue selected. For example, some social activities can take place in a public park, but rooms are needed for formal classes. Also, sports halls are good for sport activities, but not always appropriate when different smaller activities need to be run simultaneously. It was mentioned that some venues can have specific restrictions. For example some recreation centres do not allow a group to do Irish dancing and gymnastic on their floors. Some participants in the study being reported in this thesis, suggested that government could help by making unused, heritage-listed school buildings available to HBL groups.

8.4.2 The Cost of Venues

Despite being willing to pay for venues, the cost is an issue for HBL groups when running activities. This is especially true for small HBL support groups. The cost to rent a venue has to be considered when the price of an activity is being determined and it frequently constitutes the main portion of the cost.

Some HBL groups developed ways to secure venues at lower costs by building relationships with the owners, be they members of a local city council, church leaders, or campsite owners. Procuring venues at reduced rates can, however, put restrictions on
the use of the venues. For example, a group that uses a campsite at drastically reduced fees cannot use it during weeks when other groups book it at full price. “We are here by grace and move on when camp groups come in”, explained the leader of this HBL support group on this. This is also true in the case of sports venues. Also, groups meeting at church buildings sometimes have to cancel or move to other venues when the church needs the room on a weekday for a funeral or some other religious event.

8.4.3 Lack of Storing Space at Venue

It is claimed by participants in the study being reported here that not having a place to store equipment at the venue is an issue to HBL support-group leaders. The group leaders or activity presenters often store all needed equipment at their homes and then transport it from there to the venue and back every week. It is held that most homeschoolers do not have necessary storing space at their private homes. Further, in addition to the packing away and transporting being time-consuming, there is an increased possibility of items getting lost, broken or forgotten. On this, HBL leaders would like to use venues where they could leave their equipment in a room, or at least have a cupboard where they could lock it away.

8.4.4 No Permanent Central Resource Centre

At the time the study reported in this thesis was conducted, there was no central or localised resource centre for the HBL community in WA. All the HBL support-organisation leaders did their work from home. Also, all documents and resources related to HBL support-group activities were kept at their homes. It was held that in the past, HBLN had a resource library, but they had nowhere to house it except in a shed or loft, and therefore they had to sell it off.
Some participants held that, as the HBL community in WA grows, having a central homeschool resource centre would give the HBL community a focal point where they could go for information and support. Some participants expressed the view that such a resource centre should be directly linked to HBLN and act as “a premises where HBLN can have their headquarters”. One participant described the situation thus:

To have a decent size premises where HBLN can have an office to keep all their admin stuff, and an educational resource library and a room for workshops so that they wouldn’t need to keep hiring rooms, and also hiring it out again for people running classes.

Other participants articulated the need for a central resource centre for the HBL community in WA, but did not directly link it with HBLN. In the words of one participant:

It would be great if new people can say, ‘There is the Resource Centre of Homeschooling in WA where I can get all the books on homeschooling, I can go there to borrow resources, and see the scheduled workshops that are on’.

These participants acknowledged that the HBL community would have to pay for a person to administer the resource centre and consider finding an appropriate premises for it.

### 8.4.5 Safety of Venues

The fifth sub-theme generated regarding ‘venues’, is ‘safety’. All venues used for HBL activities have to be safe. It is held that on a physical level, venues should comply with minimum health and safety standards. However, it is also recognised that children have to be safe on a social-emotional level when using the venues.

An example that illustrates this issue is the use of public venues for HBL activities. Participants expressed their concern that when public venues are used, the students share them with members of the general public, a small number of whom may
occasionally try to cause physical or emotional harm to the students. For example, HBL students attending classes at a public venue have to share toilets with the general public, and not only members of their group. The HBL community prefers to use facilities where, when the parents are not with the children, the children are not exposed to members of the general public.

8.5 ISSUES RELATED TO EMOTIONAL OVERLOAD AND BURNOUT

The fifth theme generated regarding ‘the practice of HBL’ is ‘emotional load and burnout’. The participants described ‘burnout’ as a state of emotional, mental and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. The person suffering burnout is held to feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained and unable to meet the constant demands of the HBL task. This theme can be considered in terms of four sub-themes, namely ‘HBL parents’, ‘HBL support-group leaders’, ‘local contact people’ and ‘entire families’. These sub-themes represent groupings within the HBL community who are particularly at risk of emotional overload and burnout. These sub-themes can be mutually inclusive. For example, the HBL support-group leader may be an active homeschooling parent who sometimes acts as the local contact person and has her entire family involved in the activities run by the HBL support group she leads. An HBL parent who is not involved in the leadership of HBL groups, can also experience issues related to the HBL parent burnout.

8.5.1 HBL Parents

It is held by HBL support-organisation leaders that homeschooling one or more children is a demanding activity. The participants in the study said they are convinced that despite all of the advantages of homeschooling for the family, without effective multi-level support, most parents reach a stage where they are totally exhausted and frustrated. As one participant explained: “We accept the responsibility of our choice to home-
educate, but we also have bad days, as any normal parent has.” Another expanded as follows: “Home-schooling mothers are the busiest people there are!” Also, the level of support provided by the father and the number of children being homeschooled, can have an influence on the emotional load of the homeschooling mother. Such emotional load and burnout can be not only detrimental to family harmony and the educational progress of the HBL student, but also be a major reason why HBL students are placed in, or returned to, ‘regular’ schools.

HBL support-group leaders seek to prevent burnout by alleviating the emotional load on HBL parents. Two ways suggested to do this are to provide support in the form of parent mentors, and to create organisations that offer day or half-day classes without requiring the parent to be present. On these, a participant stated that “the parents have no place where they can just drop their kids and leave them”. Such a setting would give parents the opportunity to give attention to other siblings, or have a day off to de-stress. It could also help to enrich the children’s homeschool experience as they could end up doing activities they not normally do at home.

Two properties of ‘HBL parents’ were generated regarding parents who are more prone to experiencing emotional load and burnout. The first property is ‘parents who homeschool children with special needs’. The second property is ‘former teachers’. Each of these properties will now be discussed in turn.

8.5.1.1 Parents of Children with Special Needs

It is held by participants in the study reported here that parents homeschooling children with special needs are under added pressure and are more vulnerable to emotional burn-out than other homeschoolers. As fulltime carers of their children, they have very little time for themselves and they may also have very little social contact outside their own
homes. Due to their children’s learning challenges it may be difficult to obtain an appropriate curriculum or to join homeschooling co-ops.

### 8.5.1.2 Former Teachers

There is also a view amongst leaders of HBL support groups in WA that parents who were teachers before they started the homeschooling journey can put themselves under added pressure. It is held that these parents bring expectations and teaching methods used in the school system to the homeschooling setting. They may be very strict on themselves and their children. They may spend evenings developing a curriculum on their own instead of, as one participant put it, understanding that “homeschooling is a way of living. Life becomes what drives you to incorporate your home-school journey into it”. Some of these HBL parents lead very intense lives. This can put them in danger of emotional overload and burnout. They have to take themselves through a period of deschooling at the beginning of their HBL journey to prevent burnout.

It is also held by the participants in the study reported here that former teachers have to understand that their roles changes from being the formal teacher to being a facilitator of learning when they start homeschooling. Instead of wanting to develop all of the learning experiences themselves, they need to become aware of the curricula that are available to homeschoolers. It is also suggested by HBL support-group leaders that those parents need to understand that instead of taking all of the responsibility on themselves, they “can come alongside their children and direct and guide them”.

### 8.5.2 HBL Support-Group Leaders

The second sub-theme generated regarding ‘emotional load and burnout’ is ‘HBL support-group leaders’. Participants hold that their peers within the HBL community can experiences emotional load and burnout. This sub-theme includes committee
members of HBLN, organisers of HBL co-ops, and administrators of social media groups. All HBL leaders are parents, mostly mothers, who take on leadership roles within the HBL community in addition to homeschooling their own children. Also, all leadership roles are on a voluntary basis and the leaders do not receive any remuneration for the time and effort they put into being a leader within the HBL community.

It is held by participants in the study reported here that the HBL leaders take on leadership positions for various reasons. One of the reasons is that they want to ensure that their own children receive the best educational opportunities. Consequently they step-up and organise opportunities for the wider HBL community. Secondly, it is held, HBL leaders have the attitude of ‘giving back’ to organisations that helped them to reach their educational goals. Thirdly, they want to share their experience and to assist other homeschoolers on their HBL journey. Another reason why mothers become involved in the leadership of HBL organisations is to develop a circle of like-minded friends not only for their children, but also for themselves and for their families.

These leaders experience the same pressures as other HBL parents regarding the homeschooling of their own children, but have added pressures due to their leadership roles. They need to identify, organise, run and clean-up after events, do general group-related administration, and liaise with members. A particular role of HBL leaders is also to direct mothers who are new to homeschooling. Such responsibilities create an increased workload for an already time-poor group of people.

In dealing with the increased workload, the mother may either use some of the time she would normally spend with her own children to do the leadership tasks, or she has to do them during the little time she has to relax or sleep. As a participant explained: “I do all my HBLN stuff after my kids have gone to bed.”
Some of the responsibilities cannot be fulfilled after-hours. HBL group leaders or event organisers are usually the persons who arrive first and leave last at events. At events, it is held by the participants in the study reported here, they cannot sit back and relax like other mothers who attend the activity can do. Rather they need to be actively involved, manage the event, deal with problems and answer questions. The added social pressures of being a leader of an HBL group can be tiresome, especially to mothers who find social contact tiring. Leadership conflict can aggravate the situation. When a homeschooling parent is only dealing with her own children, she is in charge and makes the decisions, but as soon as she runs a group for homeschoolers, she has to consider the needs of others, and these needs could differ vastly from her own needs.

A participant described as follows the emotional load of being an HBL support-group leader and how helpful it is to have another person assisting the leader:

It does kind of take over your life sometimes. It does take away from your time and your own family time, and your own time you could have been doing other things with. Sometimes I feel like I had enough. There are times that I feel abused more than anything else, so I sometimes step back and hide away a little bit and then I come back again when I feel stronger. So nice to have (a second support person) there, she can take over when I have a recoup. She is having a recoup at the moment, and I am taking over. We run it in tandem.

It is claimed by such leaders that the issue of emotional load and burnout amongst HBL leadership is aggravated by two properties related to the general HBL community. The first property relates to the fact that the general HBL community may not fully understand the nature, structure and functions of HBL support organisations like HBLN, and therefore have unrealistic expectations of them. The second property relates to having too few members of the HBL community volunteering to help with activities. Each of these properties will now be discussed in turn.
8.5.2.1 Misunderstanding the Structure of HBL Organisations

The first property generated is ‘misunderstanding the structure of HBL organisations’. Participants in the study reported here claimed that members of the general public and most of the HBL community members are unaware of the nature, structure and functions of the HBL organisations, especially HBLN. They are concerned that many members of the community they are serving are not aware of who the leaders are, as well as what the roles involved. They held that many homeschoolers are under the impression that the leaders of HBL organisations, and specifically HBLN, are paid personnel. The result of this misconception is that the general HBL community places high demands on the HBL support-group leaders and these misguided high expectations can contribute to the emotional load and burnout of HBL support-group leaders. It is held by the HBL support-group leaders that members are frequently unaware of the amount of work that is done by these volunteer until they themselves become involved with the committee. Some of the participants shared about former HBL committee members who experienced burnt out and resigned from the leadership of HBL support organisations to focus on the needs of their own families. Participants indicated that this could have been prevented if the wider HBL community had a better understanding of the structures of HBL organisations.

8.5.2.2 Shortage of Volunteers

The second property generated regarding ‘HBL support-group leaders’ is ‘shortage of volunteers’. HBL support-group leaders highlighted the shortage of volunteers to help on different levels of the HBL support organisations as contributing to the emotional load and burnout of HBL leaders. This shortage of volunteers, it is held, could lead to overexertion, even to the point of burnout, of those few parents willing to be involved. Frequently there is nobody to step-up and take on leadership roles, leading to persons
staying in positions without having a rest period. This issue of concern will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, in Section 9.1, illuminating the impact of the lack of volunteers on HBLN as an organisation.

8.5.3 Local Contact People

The third sub-theme regarding ‘emotional load and burnout’ is ‘local contacts’. Local contacts are regular HBL parents who are willing to give new parents directions about the homeschooling activities in their local area. HBLN has a list of people living in different suburbs of Perth and in regional WA on their website. When a parent considers homeschooling or when an existing HBL family moves to a new area, they can contact these local people. However, it is held that this practice does not always function well, with new homeschoolers often requiring more support than what the contact persons have capacity to provide. The reason provided for this is that all local contact people lead busy lives, being actively involved in the homeschooling of their own children. As an example of how contact persons are experiencing emotional overload that could lead to burnout, the HBL support-group leaders alluded to the regular occurrences of the support persons not being able to take or return telephone calls of persons calling to make inquiries or needing support.

8.5.4 Entire Families

The fourth sub-theme regarding ‘emotional load and burnout’ is ‘entire families’. It is held that family burnout is especially an issue for HBL support-group leaders. All family members of HBL support-group leaders are closely involved in activities run by the HBL support-group leader, usually the mother in the family. As a participant explained:

The entire family is involved in being on the committee. Once you are on the committee, it means that your kids have to do everything;
they form the basis of all events. My kids are there to take part in absolutely everything.

The children of the leaders, it is held, are usually involved in all of the activities provided by the group. This is not necessarily because they want to be involved, but because they feel they have to go along. The families of leaders tend also to arrive earlier than other members to set up, and stay behind to clean-up after other members have left. It is also held by all HBL support-group leaders that the support or lack of support from a husband can greatly influence a homeschool mother’s effectiveness as a leader within the HBL community. The fathers are usually involved with weekend activities and, it is claimed by some HBL support-group leaders, even taking leave from work on occasions to help with major mid-week activities. This leadership responsibility frequently falls on the shoulders of a small number of families. These families can become emotionally overloaded and burnt out. It is also held that when the families of HBL leaders reach this point, the mothers frequently resign from the leadership position to focus totally on their own family’s needs and on the education of her own children.

8.6 ISSUES RELATED TO EQUAL ACCESS TO SERVICES AVAILABLE TO ‘REGULAR’ SCHOOL CHILDREN

The sixth theme generated regarding issues of concern related to the practice of HBL that HBL support organisations in WA face, is ‘equal access to services’. It is an issue for some HBL support-group leaders that homeschooling children cannot get access to support services available to children in ‘regular’ schools. HBL parents have to pay to gain access to services their children need. These services include speech therapy, help with learning problems like dyslexia or ADHD, and psychological problems like anxiety.
It is held by the leaders that the HBL community does have access to certain services available to children in ‘regular’ schools. These services include School Dental and Interm Swimming (Swimming and Water Safety program). The services are available for the HBL children, but the parents must access them within the systems and constrains dictated by the ‘regular’ schools.

Some of the participants in the study being reported here mentioned that in some countries HBL children can partake in extra-curricular activities offered by schools, such as sports clubs, choirs, and chess clubs. In WA, many extra-curricular activities are undertaken through community clubs and not through school. Thus, this type of collaboration between the HBL community and the school system does not exist.

Despite the access to services being an issue to the HBL support-organisation leaders in WA, no feeling of entitlement on the part of the HBL group leaders was sensed during the interviews. The participants verbalised a need for support services, but they very quickly added that, as one put it, “as homeschoolers we know that we are outside the system”, or as another stated, “we made the choice to educate our children outside the normal system”. They seem at peace with the fact that they made and live by their choice, and thus have to make some sacrifices.

8.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed the issues of concern related to the third area of concern, namely ‘the practice of HBL’ of HBL support-organisation leaders in carrying out their functions. In the next chapter, Chapter Nine, the fourth and last area of concern generated regarding issues of concern that HBL support-organisation leaders are facing, namely ‘HBLN as an organisation’, is discussed.
CHAPTER 9
THE CONCERNS OF LEADERS OF HBL SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS IN WA RELATED TO HBLN AS AN ORGANISATION

This chapter continues to address the aim of the study reported in this thesis by presenting an analysis of the fourth and last area of concern generated regarding issues of concern with which home-based learning (HBL) support-organisation leaders in Western Australia (WA) have to deal. This area of concern has to do with how the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN) functions as an organisation. As described earlier in Chapter Five, HBLN is the only State-wide HBL support organisation in WA.

Regarding ‘HBLN as an organisation’, nine themes were generated. The themes are ‘volunteers’, ‘the HBL community in WA not being fully aware of HBLN’s functions’, ‘management’, ‘membership’, ‘finances’, ‘succession planning’, ‘accessibility of HBLN’, ‘communication’ and ‘community involvement in HBLN run activities’. Each of these themes will now be considered in turn.

9.1 VOLUNTEERS

The first theme generated regarding ‘HBLN as an organisation’ is ‘volunteers’. Four sub-themes were generated regarding ‘volunteers’, namely ‘HBLN being run by too few volunteers’, ‘reasons for not volunteering’, ‘current situation regarding volunteering on the HBLN committee’ and ‘efforts to attract more volunteers’. Each of these sub-themes will now be considered in turn.

9.1.1  HBLN is Run by Too Few Volunteers

Volunteers play a crucial role in the success of all HBLN activities. All HBL support organisations in WA, including HBLN, are run by volunteer homeschooling parents
who offer their time, energy, and sometimes financial and other resources, in order to make opportunities available for their children and the children of the wider HBL community. These volunteers enable HBLN to function as an organisation, and provide services and conduct events for the HBL community. The more people volunteering, the more services and events can be provided for the HBL community.

The volunteering takes place on different levels, namely, locally, regionally, and centrally. Volunteers can also take on different responsibilities, ranging from helping out at events to serving on the HBLN committee.

Currently, HBLN does not have enough volunteers to deliver all of the services it wants to provide for the homeschooling community in WA. The committee claims that it struggles to attract volunteers from the HBL community to serve on the HBLN committee, as well as to run events such as the Science Day. Some events, such as the Science Fair of 2013, had to be cancelled because there were not enough volunteers to run them on the day. For other events, like the Ball for Teens, the coordinator needed volunteers on the day and people to clean up afterwards. She held that she had to ask people before she got the help. All the work, it is claimed by the HBL support-group leaders, is left to just a few willing people, who then may become burnt-out and stop being involved.

HBLN also needs more helpers in the form of volunteers to help provide a wide range of activities and services to the HBL community and keep the membership subscription and activities affordable. The HBLN committee and coordinator state that they could organise more activities if they had more volunteers supporting them. The more people available to them, they claim, who are willing to help run activities, the more activities and the wider the range of activities they can run. They claim that more HBLN-run activities will, in turn, will attract more non-HBLN members of the HBL community in
Furthermore, as more of the non-HBLN members would avail themselves of the services of HBLN, more will eventually take up HBLN membership. This increase in membership will ultimately provide HBLN with more voice in general.

9.1.2 Reasons for Not Volunteering

It is held by the HBL support-group leaders that most of HBLN’s members are homeschooled mothers who are busy caring for their families, in addition to facilitating the learning of their children in the home. Reasons given as to why these mothers do not volunteer to be on the HBLN committee or take up responsibilities within HBL support groups, include them finding that volunteering is hard work, and that it complicates their routine when they are already overloaded and time-poor. Many HBL parents treasure the time they spend with their children and do not want to complicate this period of their families’ lives by being overly involved in larger organisations. On this, one participant explained:

In the past I felt as if I wanted to be more involved with things, but there was a shift in my family when I saw the end for my oldest child’s homeschooled journey, which would then change our situation. I realised that ‘this will come to an end’ and I don’t want to be overly involved when that happens. I want to stay fairly grounded in my own family life. I don’t want it to change. I want every homeschooler to feel what I feel, just that lovely peace of doing it our own way. It is such a peaceful existence. There are always difficult moments of parenting, but those are parenting and are the same for all parents. But the home-schooling bits can be very blessed, secure and routine. I love it! We want to savour the experience and not complicate this time we spend with family by taking on additional responsibilities.

Another reason why people do not volunteer, it was claimed by the participants in the study reported here, has to do with the demographic profile of the HBL community. The HBL community served by HBLN has grown dramatically and is geographically widespread. One issue contributing to the volunteering issue is the travel distance and time it takes to get to events and meetings organised by HBLN. It is also held that it is easier to
run events for, and be a committee member of, a small organisation consisting of local members, than it is to be volunteering in a large, wide-spread organisation like HBLN. On this, one of the participants in the study being reported here, explained the issue by comparing what is involved in being on the HBLN committee with being involved with a local Scout group; for HBLN there are four to six committee members for over 1000 children, while a Scout group has “a committee of 8 people for 40 kids”.

9.1.3 The Current Situation Regarding Volunteering on the HBLN Committee

At the time the research being reported here was conducted, namely, during the period 2013 to 2015, the HBLN committee was in desperate need of more volunteers to help run various aspects of the organisation. This was an important issue for the HBL support-group leaders, and specifically for the HBLN committee. They send out a call-for-help via e-mail to all of their members. At that stage the committee comprised of only four volunteer members, all of whom were homeschooling full-time. The HBL community was growing at an exceptional rate. With their growing numbers, their needs increased. The current volunteers, it was claimed by HBL support-group leaders, struggled to manage the increased workload and needed the help of the wider homeschool community. Members were asked to think seriously about how they could assist the organisation as volunteers were needed in different areas.

At the beginning of 2015 HBLN needed volunteers as committee members, including for the position of treasurer and as event organisers. Organisers were needed to organise the Sport Day, Ball for Teens, Science Fair and Teen Café. It was suggested that the role of event organiser could be divided into several different roles and be managed by a team of volunteers, with one person acting as overall organiser.
The first paid position on the HBLN committee was created during the second half of 2014. It was the position of HBLN coordinator. A long-serving committee member who was homeschooling her two teenage children, was appointed to this position. It was felt that by appointing her in this paid position, she might keep on serving the HBL community as an HBLN committee member up to and beyond the end of her children’s homeschool journey. The coordinator is paid for one day a week and she works another two days a week as a volunteer. She claims, however, that she needs more helpers to run the events she organises. As she explained: “I don’t mind organising the activities, but I am looking for hands to help.”

9.1.4 Efforts to Attract More Volunteers

Attracting more volunteers to serve on the HBLN committee is a challenge for the HBL support leaders. The committee members claim they have tried to attract more volunteers in different ways, for example by giving volunteers free access to events, simplifying being on the HBLN committee, and ensuring that the volunteering hours are used effectively. Each of these ways is now discussed in more detail.

9.1.4.1 Free Access to Events

In an effort to attract more volunteers and make volunteering easier, HBLN gives volunteers free access to events. However, they found that it does not make volunteering more attractive and big events, like the holding of the Sports Day, remain in jeopardy each year due to a lack of volunteers. In 2013 a large number of teenage volunteers helped run the Sports Day, but in 2014 it remained a struggle to the last minute to have enough volunteers on the day.
9.1.4.2 **Simplifying Being on the HBLN Committee**

It is claimed by HBL support-group leaders that HBLN finds it difficult to get volunteers to fill positions falling vacant on the HBLN committee. In the not-so-distant past, becoming a member of the HBLN committee was a formal process. Volunteers had to be nominated and voted in at the AGM. Thus they needed to be known within the homeschooling community. Some of the committee members had to travel great distances to attend monthly meetings at a venue in Perth, thus requiring that they make a substantial financial and time commitment. To compensate and “to try and make better use of everyone’s time”, the committee decided that from the beginning of 2015, the monthly meetings would change to teleconferences. The committee then only met in person once per term.

9.1.4.3 **Effective Use of Volunteering Hours**

HBLN is aware that the time available to homeschooling families is precious and they claim they make sure that the amount of it used as volunteers is used effectively. Before taking on an event, HBLN reflects about the likely effectiveness of time use. They also reflect after each event whether the benefits of an event justify the investment of time and effort from all the volunteers. For example, the 1000 volunteer hours spent organising and running a homeschooling conference in 2008 which was attended by only 80 people, was not considered, as an HBLN committee member put it, “a really good return on, or a good use of our time”. As a result, HBLN does not plan to organise such a major conference in the near future.
9.2 HBL COMMUNITY IN WA IS NOT FULLY AWARE OF HBLN’S FUNCTIONS

The second theme generated regarding issues of concern facing HBL support-organisation leaders regarding ‘HBLN as an organisation’ has to do with the HBL community in WA not being fully aware of HBLN’s functions. It is held that this lack of awareness relates mostly to two areas, namely leadership of HBLN and services not provided by HBLN. These two issues of concern are now considered in turn.

9.2.1 Leadership of HBLN

There is a perception that the general homeschooling community in WA, and even HBLN members, are not fully aware of the role HBLN plays in WA. They are not aware that the organisation is run, as one participant put it, “by so few people” and “not by a whole group of people who gets paid”. It is claimed that the HBL community only sees the events HBLN organises, but does not see the ‘behind the scene’ responsibilities. As one participant, an HBLN committee member, explained: “Before I joined the committee, I was not aware of what they were doing. Now that I am involved, I understand the value of HBLN in the HBL community in WA.” A similar view was expressed by leaders of some other homeschool support groups.

Participants in the study being reported here also made it clear they are concerned that the general HBL community, including HBLN members, are not aware that the organisation is run by a few, unpaid volunteers. As one participant put it: “I just thought it was a lot more people, and when the fees went up, I kind of went, ‘Ah, OK, they are getting pay rises.’ I had no clue, and I think that more people need ‘a clue’.” She continued to explain as follows:

Personally I would like to see that people understood HBLN more; understood more what HBLN is. I don’t think it is recognised that
“I’m a mum with three kids, two of them with autism, and yet, I am standing here doing stuff for them (other homeschoolers) when they are not helping me.” I would like that to change. That is a disadvantage for me, because it can burn people out. Previous committee members had burnt out and had left. That’s not fair on them. They just try to homeschool their kids. And I think all of us are only there because we want ‘something’ to benefit our kids.

She emphasised that the HBL community in WA is at a huge disadvantage as a result of not fully understanding who the leadership of the organisation is.

9.2.2 Services Not Provided by HBLN

It is also a concern to HBL support-group leaders that many new HBL parents, especially those who take their children out of conventional schools during their later primary and secondary school years, look towards HBLN as a substitute for the school system. It is claimed by participants in the study reported here that these new HBL parents expect HBLN to provide curricula, classes and school-equivalent activities. However, this is not HBLN’s function and the organisation does not have the infrastructure, money, people or time to provide for such needs.

9.3 MANAGEMENT / LEADERSHIP OF HBLN

The third theme generated regarding issues of concern facing HBL support-organisation leaders regarding HBLN as an organisation relates to management and leadership. These issues of concern are now considered under five sub-themes, namely, ‘not enough committee members’, ‘high turnover of committee members’, ‘need for long-serving committee members’, ‘spreading the leadership responsibility’ and ‘characteristics of HBLN committee members’.

9.3.1 Not Enough Committee Members

It is claimed that the current management and leadership structures of HBLN provide challenges for the leaders. HBLN is run by a committee of actively homeschooling
parents who volunteer their time, expertise and energy. During the time the research project being reported here was conducted, there were only between four and six members on the HBLN committee. The leaders said they would prefer to have more members on the committee, but find it difficult to attract more people. In addition, they have experienced a high turnover of committee members. Also, they claim that they are overworked, and certain tasks may not be done because none of them has time or expertise to do them.

9.3.2 High Turnover of Committee Members

The high turnover of committee members is also a concern for the HBL support-group leaders. It is very hard to create stability on the committee and develop any forward momentum for the organisation when the committee members keep changing every year. It is held that new members have to be trained before they can be fully effective. Also, the committee cannot plan very far ahead if the members don’t know who will be on the committee in 12 months’ time, or whether they have the resource, especially in the form of new committee members, to act on, or support, any plan they have in mind.

9.3.3 Need for Long-Serving Committee Members

The HBL support-group leaders claim that long-serving committee members are needed in order for HBLN to function successfully. It is claimed by them that committee members must build up knowledge and experience to lead the organisation into the future. At the time the study reported in this thesis took place, the HBLN coordinator had been on the committee for more than 10 years. When she joined it, there was another lady already serving for a few years who ended up serving for more than 10 years.
These long-serving members provide continuity and stability for the committee. They also have valuable social contacts. As one of the participants put it, they “provide the history for the people on the committee”. They put “things in perspective”, by for example reminding new members of what happened in the past and why things worked or did not work. The participant continued:

I do not want to be a naysayer of everything, I try to put things in perspective since there are obviously no point in doing something we already did in the past and it did not work, we have limited resources - we are all home-educating our own kids so, our time is precious and we have to make sure that our time is used effectively.

Thus when new members raise suggestions or come with fresh ideas, long-serving members could tell the newer members what happened in the past.

9.3.4 Spreading the Leadership Responsibility

HBLN committee participants in the study being reported here are also concerned that people do not want to join the committee and that all the work and responsibility falls on the same people. At the time the study was conducted, the participants claimed that most of the work of HBLN was done by one highly effective HBLN committee member. It was held that she organised and ran different events with the help of parent volunteers. However, if she had to step out of this role, HBL support-group leaders claimed, there would be nobody who could take it over.

9.3.5 Characteristics of HBLN Committee Members

Bearing in mind the responsibilities of HBLN committee members, it is clear that members volunteering for these positions need to have certain characteristics and skills. Although HBLN offers training to new committee members, and they can learn from more experienced committee members, new members need to have the time, interest, knowledge and experience to make a contribution. Some committee positions, like that
of treasurer, require that the holders have specific skills and expertise. Because the committee members have to represent the entire HBL community on such matters as negotiation with the Department of Education, it was held by the participants that they need to be knowledgeable about all homeschooling issues. The committee members also need the support of their families, and especially their spouses.

Some members are seriously committed to making a contribution. For example one participant stated: “I am the type of person who gets involved, and if an organisation is doing something for me, I want to give something back.” Others, however, feel that the membership base is so big and diverse that they shun away from serving on the committee. These people choose to be involved in leadership of smaller, local or more specific support groups.

9.4 MEMBERSHIP OF HBLN

The fourth theme generated regarding the area of concern ‘HBLN as an organisation’ is ‘HBLN membership’. Not all members of the HBL community in WA are members of HBLN. Although most participants in the study reported here were members of HBLN and encouraged other homeschoolers to become members, some indicated that their membership had expired or that they had never been HBLN members.

It was also claimed by participants in the study reported here it would be advantageous for HBLN as an organisation as well as for the broader HBL community in WA, to increase their membership numbers. If the membership were higher, then HBLN would have more voice with the Department of Education and moderators, it is held. Higher membership would also increase ‘bargaining power’ with product and service providers.

It is held by HBL support-group leaders that there are various reasons why members of the HBL community in WA do not want to become HBLN members or do not want to
renew their membership. These reasons include cost, unawareness of the functions and value of HBLN, their needs being met elsewhere, some homeschoolers favouring involvement with less inclusive groups, HBLN membership not being considered as value for money, insurance costs and administration, and being unregistered homeschoolers. Each of these reasons will now be considered in turn.

9.4.1 Cost

It was held by participants in the study reported here that a major reason why members of the HBL community do not become HBLN members or renew their HBLN membership, is the cost of membership. Membership fees have increased drastically in recent years to compensate for insurance cost and to create a paid position on the committee.

9.4.2 Unawareness about Function and Value of HBLN

Another reason why members of the HBL community do not become members of HBLN is because they are unaware of the functions and value of the organisation. They do not have an understanding of everything HBLN does for the homeschooling community in WA. Instead, they think that the only value they get for their membership fees is the one or two HBLN events that their families attend during a year.

9.4.3 Needs are Met Elsewhere

Another major reason, it is held by participants, why people do not become members or keep up their HBLN membership is because they perceive that all their needs are met by other specific HBL support groups that they attend. As one participant explained about one large group:

There are such a really substantial community there (at her local HBL support group). If you are proactive in your efforts, you could have all of your needs for your children being met within that group.
There is no need to join HBLN. So there is a feeling of ‘why should I join HBLN? All my needs are being met.

It is claimed that they do not see the point in joining HBLN in an environment where “so many free services are available”. Instead, they prefer to join online support groups which organise regular outings, but do not have membership fees.

9.4.4 Prefer Less Inclusive Groups

It is held by participants that some members of the HBL community find HBLN membership too inclusive. They prefer to associate with HBL support groups serving a specific grouping within the HBL community such as homeschoolers of a specific religious persuasion or those who adopt a particular learning style.

9.4.5 Not Value for Money

There are some HBL members who do not think that they get value for their money when becoming a member of HBLN. In the words of one participant, “a lot of people out there will go along to HBLN events, but they don’t think it is worth it to spend the money to be a member”. As another participant explained:

My first year, I paid my HBLN subscription. It was $35-45. This year it is $100. So I didn’t actually renew my subscription, and I must also say, last year I didn’t get any benefit out of HBLN. There weren’t any events organised. I think the only benefit I got out of the whole thing, was we got a discounted rate going to Adventure World at the end of the year, and even then, it wasn’t that much of a discount. So I decided not to re-subscribe this year, especially since it was $100. And I am not sorry that we didn’t, because we only did the Sports Day this year, and there is Adventure World coming up. Only the two things we would have benefitted.

It is also held that there is a group of homeschoolers who feel that the longer they are homeschooling, and as their children grow older, their needs change and they tend to less frequently attend HBLN events. They do not want to pay for services that they do not use.
9.4.6 Insurance Cost and Administration

Another reason why some members of the HBL community in WA do not want to become HBLN members or allow their membership to expire, it is held, has to do with insurance. In addition to increased membership fees due to insurance costs, administering the insurance involves time-consuming paperwork. As members of HBLN they feel they have to comply with HBLN’s guidelines regarding insurance. Because they do not want to comply with them, they prefer not to be HBLN members.

9.4.7 Unregistered Homeschoolers

Another reason held why some members of the HBL community in WA may not become members of HBLN is because they are unregistered with the Department of Education and they are afraid they may be identified. As a participant indicated, “they may not want to have their names on a list somewhere”. This is despite HBLN being serious about keeping membership details confidential.

9.5 FINANCES OF HBLN

The fifth theme generated regarding the area of concern ‘HBLN as an organisation’ is ‘finances of HBLN’. HBLN is a not-for-profit organisation that provides support services to the HBL community in WA. It is claimed that HBLN needs more funds, not only to keep the organisation and committee running, but also to extend their services to the HBL community. Issues of concern to do with HBLN’s finances will now be considered under three sub-themes, namely, expenses, income, and growing need for services.

9.5.1 Expenses

It was claimed by participants in the study reported here that HBLN’s expenses increased greatly over the last few years. It was explained that up to 2013, the expenses
of HBLN consisted of the running cost of the organisation like fuel, telephone charges and printing cost. HBLN members who offered services usually carried the associated expenses themselves. Also, since all events are organised on a cost-neutral basis, the cost of each event is covered by the registration fee for that event and is therefore not part of the membership fees. However, with the legislative changes around indemnity insurance requirements, the expenses of HBLN increased dramatically. In addition, the amount of administration involved in the provision of insurance to the HBL community created the need for a paid position on the committee. Having a paid position on the committee again increased the expenses of HBLN.

9.5.2 Income

All HBLN’s funds come from membership fees. A major fee increase took place during 2014 to compensate for the cost of insurance and the paid position on the committee. The increased membership fees resulted in some members not renewing their membership because it became too expensive for some families.

9.5.3 Growing Need for Services

It is claimed by HBL support-group leaders that more money is needed to provide for the needs of the growing HBL community in WA. As the HBL community grows in numbers and in diversity (as described in Chapter Six), the demand for services to be provided by HBLN, increases. If more money was available, it is claimed, more and more diverse services could be rendered. This would especially be true if sufficient funds were available to source some of the services from independent, third party providers.
9.6 SUCCESSION PLANNING

The sixth theme generated regarding ‘HBLN as an organisation’ is ‘succession planning’. From the time of its foundation to the time the study reported in this thesis took place, HBLN was run by a committee of volunteering, homeschooling parents. For the successful continuation of the organisation, it is held, an effective succession strategy is necessary. A succession strategy would deal with how the organisation plans and put processes in place for when one or more of the committee members step down from their positions. A succession plan would involve nurturing and developing HBLN members to become effective committee members and fill key roles within the organisation.

Since the foundation of the organisation, it is claimed, succession within HBLN has changed. In the past there were more people wanting to be on the committee than there were positions available. The result was that committee members were voted in. However in the decade leading to the time the study reported in this thesis was conducted, fewer and fewer parents volunteered to serve on the committee, and the continued existence of the organisation was in danger a few times. Any homeschooling parent willing to be on the committee was welcomed onto it. HBLN offered training and development for new committee members.

Since 2014 the position of HBLN coordinator was created and filled by, it is held, an experienced, enthusiastic, knowledgeable mother in her last year of homeschooling. She is planning to stay in this position for the near future. At this stage there seems to be nobody else who have the time, skills, energy or commitment to step-up to take over from her. As a participant explained: “She (the coordinator) is the backbone of the organisation.”
The seventh theme generated regarding ‘HBLN as an organisation’ is ‘accessibility of HBLN’. It is claimed by participants in the study reported here that the general public, including prospective homeschoolers, find it difficult to identify and make contact with the HBL support organisations in WA, and specifically HBLN.

It is also held that one of the reasons why it is difficult to make contact with HBL support groups in WA, is the wide range of terminology in use describing this alternative form of education. The perception is that since the internet arrived, it would be easier to access HBL support organisations, but it still proves difficult. For example, at the time the study reported here was conducted, entering the term ‘Homeschooling in WA’ in Google’s search engine, did not return the main HBL support organisation, HBLN, in the top results. Rather, the top result for such a search was HomeschoolWA, which is an organisation serving a specific sector of the HBL community in WA. The HBLN committee members feel that this creates the impression that HomeschoolWA is the ‘go-to’ organisation in WA. As a result, they changed the name of HBLN on their website to ‘Home Education WA’ or HEWA. Regarding the name change, a participant explained:

That is what people type in when they google. They don’t look for ‘home-based learning’. We are hardly at home, we are not ‘home-based’. I wish I was, but I am not. My life does not involve the home as much as I like it to. So, I am not home-based. ‘Parent-led education’ is what it is, but nobody will google that (‘parent-led education’).

Participants in the study being reported here also indicated that initially they found it difficult to find or make contact with HBL support organisations, and specifically HBLN. Most homeschoolers heard about the existence of HBLN and other support groups in conversations with other homeschoolers. This is also true of many other,
smaller and exclusive HBL support groups in WA. Different to HBLN, these groups are frequently closed groups with no web presence.

**9.8 COMMUNICATION**

The eighth theme generated regarding ‘HBLN as an organisation’ that faces HBL support-organisation leaders in WA, has to do with the way HBLN communicates with its members, other HBL organisations and the general HBL community in WA. At the time the study reported here was conducted, communication on all three of these levels were creating challenges for HBLN as an organisation.

At that stage, communication between HBLN and its members was through newsletters send out via e-mail. HBLN also made information available on their website for all members of the HBL community to access. However, it was held by some that it was a one-way communication. Closer to the end of the current study, HBLN indicated that social media would also be used in future to communicate with members and the wider HBL community. The use of social media, it is held by the HBLN coordinator, would facilitate two-way communication between HBLN leadership, members and the wider HBL community.

It is held by leaders of smaller HBL support groups that ineffective communication between HBLN and other HBL groups in WA, can lead to duplication of services and events. HBLN is sometimes unaware of what is happening at the local level in the HBL community. Different groups within the HBL community in general, and even within HBLN affiliated groups, may conduct the similar events to what HBLN is planning. An example of how ineffective communication could lead to duplication of services and events happened in 2014 when HBLN struggled to organise, and later had to cancel, a talent concert a few weeks after one of the regional groups had run a successful talent
quest. The regional group was unaware of HBLN planning such a similar event. If they had known about it they could have taken over the responsibility of running the State-wide talent concert.

Considering communication with HBLN members, two sub-themes were generated, namely ‘members not reading HBLN newsletters’ and ‘technology and social media resistance’. Each of these sub-themes will now be considered in turn.

### 9.8.1 Members Not Reading HBLN Newsletters

HBLN communicates with its members via electronic newsletters. These newsletters are sent to the e-mail address of each member, but are also available on the HBLN webpage. Links to the newsletters are also posted on the HBLN facebook page, as well as on a number of other HBL relevant facebook pages.

It is held by HBLN committee members, that many members do not read the newsletters and other HBLN communications. As one committee members said: “The people don’t read anymore! They don’t even click on the e-mail to open it.” It is held that this could be because homeschoolers are too busy with the homeschooling task at hand. The result, however, is that they are not aware of what HBLN is doing or of the many opportunities available through HBLN.

It was suggested by most participants that “it is better to talk” individually or in groups. According to them, information is better spread by word of mouth. It order to promote this, HBLN intend to encourage the establishment of local support groups where individual homeschoolers could communicate with local leaders who could make them aware of happenings on the HBL scene in WA. These local leaders, it is suggested, could potentially also act as contact persons in communication back to HBLN.
9.8.2 Technology and Social Media Resistance

The second sub-theme generated regarding ‘communication’ ‘technology and social media resistance’. There are a few HBL parents, it is held by some participants, who do not use technology effectively. For example, they struggle to navigate the website and cannot use computers to do video-conferencing. There are also some HBL parents who try to limit their exposure to social media. These parents do not have such social media as facebook accounts and, consequently, cannot be reached in this way. Since most HBLN communication in future may be done via social media, these people may miss out not only on receiving information, but also on the opportunity to voice their opinion or giving feedback.

9.9 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN HBLN-RUN ACTIVITIES

The ninth theme generated regarding issues of concern that challenges HBL support-organisation leaders in WA in the area of concern ‘HBLN as an organisation’, relates to the HBL community’s involvement in activities organised by HBLN. These issues of concern are now considered under two sub-themes, namely, ‘HBLN members not attending HBLN organised events’ and ‘non-HBLN members attending HBLN events’.

9.9.1 HBLN Members Not Attending HBLN-organised Events

It is held by HBLN committee members that, despite the large membership of HBLN, events organised by them are not well attended by members. Many members are not interested in attending the events or getting involved as volunteers. Various reasons are given why members tend not to attend HBLN organised events. Some mothers with smaller children tend to find it tiring on the family and prefer not to attend large events. Also, families with older children may prefer to use the time on their own projects
instead of events that include younger children. The travel distance to events is also considered by some to be an issue.

The involvement and participation of the homeschool community in the events organised by the homeschool support organisations and HBLN specifically, greatly influence the success of events. Well-attended events include the yearly Sports Day and End of the Year function (Adventure World Day). However, the Film Festival and Art Festival were poorly supported in the past. In 2014, the concert had to be cancelled due to lack of participant interest. In 2013 the Science Fair had to be cancelled because there were not enough volunteers. The HBLN committee decided to focus on running large events that have been proven to be successful in the past.

9.9.2 Non-HBLN Members Attending HBLN Events

HBLN leadership is concerned about a large section of the HBL community who are not HBLN members, attends events organised by the organisation. For example, the 2013 Sports Day was attended by about 300 children of whom 150 came from families who were not HBLN members. These families use the services provided by HBLN volunteers without financially contributing to the organisation by paying membership fees. They only pay the event registration fee or a small amount to cover their insurance.

It is held by HBLN committee members that by not becoming members, they do not financially contribute to the running of the organisation. They also cause HBLN to be less representative of the HBL community in WA. This angers HBLN committee members who spend their free time organising events for people who do not support the organisation by becoming members. This issue is illustrated by the words of one participant:

I have been paying and supporting HBLN even before my child was school age, because I know the association work really hard in doing
what they do and I have been involved with associations in the past. I am the type of person who thinks: these people are really going out of their way to do something for me, so I want to give something back. And if the only thing I give back is the membership, then so be it.

She argued that if HBLN events were only attended by members, fewer volunteers would be needed to run these events. However, she also acknowledges that opening HBLN events to all homeschoolers in WA is a way of serving the entire HBL community of WA.

9.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed the fourth and last area of concern generated regarding issues of concern that HBL support-organisation leaders have to deal with, namely ‘HBLN as an organisation’. The next chapter provides of an overview of the study, a higher order analysis of the findings presented in Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine, and implications of the research.
10.1 INTRODUCTION

Home-based learning (HBL) is a growing, legal educational alternative in many countries, including Australia. Different organisations developed to support this practice of parents or guardians taking responsibility for the education of their compulsory school-age children outside the conventional school system. These organisations include support groups and social networks with a wide range of functions. These HBL support organisations play an important role within the HBL community. The research reported in this thesis focused on the history of the background of HBL support organisations, on the perspectives of HBL support-group leaders on the functions of HBL support organisations in Western Australia (WA), and on the issues of concern that present themselves for the leaders of these organisations regarding the support of the diverse HBL community in WA.

A broad interpretive approach was adopted for the study as the aim was to reveal issues rather than build on existing ideas. Also, the study was driven by the desire that understandings developed should have practical relevance.

This final chapter opens with an overview of the study. A higher order analysis of the issues of concern of HBL support-group leaders is then presented building on that offered in Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine. This is followed by a consideration of the transferability of the research results. Attention is then given to the implications of the study for the development of policy and practice. Finally, consideration is given to the implications of the study for future research.
10.2 OVERVIEW

The study reported in this thesis set out to develop understandings on a specific aspect of HBL in WA, namely HBL support organisations. The research was guided by three aims. The first aim was to develop an understanding of the historical background to HBL support groups in WA, and in particular of the Home-Based Learning Network (HBLN), the only State-wide HBL support organisation. The second aim was to develop an understanding of the functions of HBLN in meeting the diverse needs of the HBL community in the State. The third aim was to develop an understanding of the issues of concern for the leaders of HBL support groups in WA in carrying out their functions.

The first chapter of the thesis outlined the broad research context of HBL internationally, in Australia and specifically in WA, including the support structures available. Chapter Two then set out the context of the study. It considered HBL in further detail by explaining different terms used for this alternative form of education, outlining partners in HBL, and describing different approaches used in the practice. HBL and the HBL support organisations were further described within an international, Australian and WA contexts. Different types of HBL support organisations were also explained.

Chapter Three examined the literature that pertains to HBL internationally, nationally and in WA. It concluded that HBL support organisations have been the focus of very few studies internationally, and none in Australia. The study reported in this thesis, as already indicated, has been offered as a response to attempt to rectify the deficit.

Chapter Four presented the research design and methodology of the study. The central aim was to develop understandings about the background to HBL support groups in WA, their functions, and issues of concern for their leaders. Qualitative methods of data
gathering proposed by ‘grounded theorists’ were employed. These research methods are consistent with the symbolic interaction view of human action, offering a comprehensive and systematic framework for inductively generating theory. Data gathering took place through interviewing and document study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the leaders of HBL support organisations in WA.

Grounded theory methods of data analysis were adopted. This involved engaging in open coding to reduce the raw data to concepts. These concepts were then developed into themes and related sub-themes to form the basis of the understandings which were eventually developed.

The results of the first and second research questions were presented in Chapter Five. This chapter provided an understanding of the historical background and development of functions of HBLN as the only State-wide organisation in WA providing a diverse range of support services to the HBL community. The chapter also provided an understanding of the perspectives of participants on the functions of HBLN within the WA context during the time the research reported in the thesis was conducted. It should enable the reader to understand the contemporary situation regarding HBL support in the State. Five themes were generated regarding the functions of HBLN, namely ‘official functions’, ‘non-official functions’, ‘unintended functions’, ‘functions that are not desired’ and ‘aspirational functions’. Sub-themes were generated under each of the themes.

Very limited literature is available on the functions of HBL support groups. Most of the sub-themes generated regarding ‘official functions’ were also identified by Bishop (1991) as either functions of, or concerns that could be developed into functions of, a homeschool support group in Kansas, USA, 25 years before the study reported in this thesis was conducted. However, contrary to what Bishop (1991) and Lines (1987) found
for support organisations at the beginning of the new homeschooling movement in the USA, when legislators were still grappling with how to deal with homeschoolers, HBLN does not consider providing legislative and legal information to its members as one of its official functions, but as an unofficial function. Limited financial resources and volunteer availability constrains HBLN’s relationship with the Department of Education in WA.

An overview of the results of the study with regards to Research Question Three as presented in Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine are represented in Table 10.1 (overleaf).

Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine provided an understanding of the major issues of concern for HBL support-organisation leaders in WA in supporting the HBL community in the State. On this, four areas of concern were generated, namely, concerns related to the various characteristics of the HBL community in WA, concerns related to various State authorities, concerns related to the practice of HBL, and concerns related to HBLN as an organisation. Each of these areas of concern is further explicated in terms of its component themes and sub-themes in the following four sections.

These results are revisited in order to indicate the extent to which they relate to the existing body of literature. Since this is the first time a study focusing on this aspect of homeschooling has been conducted, it is not possible to consider all the themes and sub-themes generated in relation to other bodies of literature.
Table 10.1: Visual Representation of Issues of Concern for HBL Support-Group Leaders in WA: Areas of Concern, Themes and Sub-themes

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<tr>
<th>Areas of Concern</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Various Characteristics of HBL Community</td>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>• Numbers&lt;br&gt;• Growth&lt;br&gt;• Geographical spread&lt;br&gt;• Family circumstances</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Motivation for homeschooling</td>
<td>• Motivation to start homeschooling&lt;br&gt;• Homeschool focus&lt;br&gt;• Educational philosophies&lt;br&gt;• Different stages of homeschooling</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The nature of the students</td>
<td>• Academic abilities&lt;br&gt;• Special needs&lt;br&gt;• Challenges</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The nature of the parents</td>
<td>•</td>
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<td>Various State Authorities</td>
<td>Scepticism towards authorities</td>
<td>• Working relationship&lt;br&gt;• Statistics on registered homeschoolers&lt;br&gt;• Unregistered homeschoolers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>National and State legislation</td>
<td>• Moderators not understanding homeschoolers&lt;br&gt;• Evaluation standards used by moderators&lt;br&gt;• Moderators misinform home-educators</td>
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<td>The Department of Education in WA</td>
<td>• Insurance under HBLN&lt;br&gt;• Own insurance&lt;br&gt;• Groups without insurance</td>
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<td>Moderators</td>
<td>• Financial support</td>
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<td>Insurance</td>
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<td>• General public&lt;br&gt;• School principals and teachers&lt;br&gt;• Professionals&lt;br&gt;• Academic quality of HBL members&lt;br&gt;• Addressing issues of acceptance</td>
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<td>Future pathways for HBL graduates</td>
<td>• Future pathways for HBL graduates&lt;br&gt;• Pathways available&lt;br&gt;• Unawareness of pathways</td>
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<td>• Finance</td>
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<td>• Restricted family income&lt;br&gt;• Affordability of activities&lt;br&gt;• Relevance of fundraising&lt;br&gt;• Access to grants&lt;br&gt;• Providing HBL services not being a lucrative business</td>
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<td>• Availability&lt;br&gt;• Cost&lt;br&gt;• Storing space&lt;br&gt;• No permanent central resource centre&lt;br&gt;• Safety</td>
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<td>• Emotional load and burnout&lt;br&gt;• HBL parents&lt;br&gt;• HBL support-group leaders&lt;br&gt;• Local contact people&lt;br&gt;• Entire families</td>
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### Areas of Concern

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<th>Themes</th>
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<td>• Equal access to services</td>
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<td>• Reasons for not volunteering</td>
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<td>• Volunteers</td>
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<td>• Efforts to attract more volunteers</td>
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<td>• HBL community in WA</td>
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<td>not fully aware of HBLN’s functions</td>
<td>• Services not provided by HBLN</td>
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<td>• High turnover of committee members</td>
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<td>• Need for long-serving committee members</td>
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<td>• Spreading the leadership responsibility</td>
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<td>• Characteristics of HBLN committee members</td>
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<td>• Unawareness of the functions and value of HBLN</td>
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<td>• Growing need for services</td>
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<td>• Non-HBLN members attending HBLN events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 10.2.1 Area of Concern: Various Characteristics of the HBL Community in WA

The members of the HBL community are various in character. The only characteristic that all have in common is the belief that parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children. This creates issues for the support of the HBL community. Such a situation is also well documented, both in international literature (Lines, 1987;
The issues of concern regarding the various characteristics of members of the HBL community in WA were considered under four themes, namely ‘demographics’; ‘motivation for homeschooling’; ‘the nature of the students’; and ‘the nature of the parents’.

The first theme was ‘demographics’ of the HBL community in WA and included the difficulty in determining the number of homeschoolers in the State. This accords with the findings by Chapman (2012) and Harding (2008). Also, the HBL community in WA is growing as more parents choose homeschooling because of dissatisfaction with the school experience, lifestyle choice and being second-generation homeschoolers.

The second theme was ‘motivation for homeschooling’. The HBL community in WA is diverse regarding the reasons why they start homeschooling, what their homeschool focus is, what their educational philosophies are, and what their stage of homeschooling is. Homeschool parents can be divided into two groups based on their motivation to start homeschooling their children, namely philosophical homeschoolers who ‘always wanted to teach their children at home’ and are well-prepared for homeschooling, and necessity-based homeschoolers who do not necessarily want to homeschool, but have to because their children do not ‘fit into’ regular school. This concurs with the findings of Harrison (1996) over 20 years ago that parents who remove their children from school due to negative experiences are less prepared to instruct than mothers who homeschool for philosophical reasons and need extensive support.

The homeschooling community in WA is also perceived diverse in relation to what is considered to be the focus of homeschooling, namely, if it is for academic, social-emotional, sport, arts, lifestyle or religious reasons. This is congruent with the findings
of Barratt-Peacock (1997), again nearly 20 years ago, and have important implications for the support of the HBL community. Also, the educational philosophy of homeschoolers varies from formal school-at-home and classical education, to unschoolers and natural learners. This also concurs with findings reported elsewhere (Barratt-Peacock, 1997; Harding, 2006, 2008; Thomas, 1998; Van Schalkwyk, 2010).

The third theme regarding concerns related to the various characteristics of the HBL community that HBL support-group leaders experience in supporting of the HBL community, was ‘the nature of the students’. Under this theme, consideration was given to three sub-themes, namely ‘academic abilities’, ‘special needs’ and ‘challenges’. Parents who homeschool their children with special needs require support, a matter previously considered by Reilly (2007) who investigated how parents deal with home schooling children with intellectual disabilities.

The fourth theme regarding the various characteristics of the HBL community that create challenges for the HBL support-group leaders was ‘the nature of the parents’.

10.2.2 Area of Concern: Various State Authorities

The second area of concern related to various State authorities. Related issues of concern were considered under six themes, namely, ‘scepticism towards authorities’, ‘national and State legislation’, ‘the Department of Education in WA’, ‘moderators’, ‘insurance’ and ‘finance’.

The first theme, namely ‘general scepticism towards authorities’, has not been the focus of previous studies, but Soczka (2007) and Bell (2013) both described the difficulty they experienced in recruiting research participants from the HBL community because of a wariness that the research findings might be used by authorities against them. The results of the present study concur with the experience of both of these researchers.
Five further themes were generated, but it was not possible to consider them in relation to existing literature since this is the first time a study focusing on this aspect of homeschooling has been conducted. Therefore these themes with their associated sub-themes are only briefly referred to. The second theme under the area of concern relating to ‘various State authorities’ was ‘national and State legislation’. No sub-themes were generated regarding ‘national and State legislation’. The third theme was ‘the Department of Education in WA’. On this, three sub-themes were generated, namely, ‘working relationship’, ‘statistics on registered homeschoolers’ and ‘unregistered homeschoolers’.

The fourth theme related to ‘moderators’. On this, three sub-themes were generated, namely ‘moderators not understanding homeschoolers’, ‘evaluation standards used by moderators’ and ‘moderators misinform home-educators’. Regarding evaluation standards, HBL support-group leaders claimed that moderators vary in their approaches, that there is no uniform set of criteria and no consistency in the criteria applied by the different moderators, that some evaluation criteria used are inappropriate or unfair, and that evaluation standards and documentation handed out by moderators are drawn up by them on an individual basis.

The fifth theme of issue that HBL support-organisation leaders have to contend with that relates to authorities, was ‘insurance’. It is claimed that insurance administration is costly, time-consuming and complicated. Groupings within the HBL community in WA choose to deal with this issue in various ways. Three sub-themes were generated regarding ‘insurance’, namely ‘insurance under HBLN, to becoming incorporated and obtaining their own insurance, or operating without insurance.

The sixth theme was ‘finances’ and related to financial support to homeschoolers. No sub-themes were generated under this theme. Limited funds are a concern for the HBL
community because the vast majority of HBL families are single-income ones and the
education of their children is not subsidised, while that of children in public or private
schools. Nevertheless, while financial support from the government would be
welcomed, they are wary of being offered it subject to restrictions then being placed on
them.

10.2.3 Area of Concern: The Practice of HBL

Chapter Eight addresses the third area of concern, namely, the practice of HBL. On this,
six themes of issues were considered, namely ‘acceptance within the non-
‘emotional load and burnout’ and ‘equal access to services’. Again, the body of research
regarding this field is very limited.

The first theme, namely ‘acceptance within non-homeschooling community’, were
discussed under five sub-themes, namely ‘general public’, ‘school principals and
teachers’, ‘professionals’, ‘academic quality of HBL members’ and ‘addressing issues
of acceptance’. HBL communities address related concerns by trying to increase
community involvement and to ensure media coverage is based on correct facts. This is
similar to the results of Vaughan (2003), who found that public school educators
criticized homeschooling practices by saying that they do not provide for socialisation
and extra-curricular experiences. She found that homeschool co-ops address these
needs. This also concurs with results by Bishop (1991) 25 years ago, who identified
‘relationships with public schools’ as a concern for homeschool support organisations.

The second theme relating to the practice of HBL was ‘future pathways of HBL
graduates’. Two sub-themes were generated under this theme, namely ‘pathways
available’ and ‘unawareness of pathways’. Despite the availability of different pathways
and HBLN informing the HBL community about them, many parents were not aware of
the different options available. On this, three other Australian studies focused on post home-education study pathways of home-educated students (Carins, 2002; Harding, 2006; McColl, 2005). The results concur on the success of home-educated students in gaining entrance to higher and further education.

The third theme was ‘financial matters’ and was considered under five sub-themes, namely, ‘restricted family income’, ‘affordability of activities’, ‘relevance of fundraising’, ‘access to grants’ and ‘providing HBL services not being a lucrative business’.

The fourth theme, ‘venues’, was considered under five sub-themes, namely ‘availability’, ‘cost’, ‘storing space’, ‘no permanent central resource centre’ and ‘safety’.

The fifth theme was ‘emotional load and burnout’. Four groups within the HBL community were identified as being particularly at risk of emotional overload and burnout. ‘Emotional load and burnout’ was therefore discussed under four sub-themes, namely ‘HBL parents’, ‘HBL support-group leaders’, ‘local contact people’ and ‘entire families’.

The sixth theme, namely ‘equal access to services’, related to homeschooling children not having equal access to services available to children in ‘regular’ schools. On this, the situation in WA differed from what Clendening (1996) found in Canada 20 years ago where school boards supported parents in home educating their children by providing support personnel, and financial resources to supplement to cost of materials, while ensuring that provincial regulations were followed.
10.2.4 Area of Concerns: HBLN as an Organisation

Chapter Nine addressed the fourth and last area of concern HBL support-group leaders face when supporting the HBL community in WA, namely ‘HBLN as an organisation’. It was considered under nine themes, namely ‘volunteers’, ‘HBL community in WA not fully aware of HBLN’s functions’, ‘management’, ‘membership’, ‘finances’, ‘succession planning’, ‘accessibility of HBLN’, ‘communication’ and ‘community involvement in HBLN-run activities’. Under some of these themes, sub-themes were generated, but since it was not possible to consider them in relation to the existing body of literature, these themes and subthemes are not further discussed here.

Since this is the first time a study focusing on this aspect of homeschooling has been conducted, it is not possible to consider many of the themes and sub-themes generated in all four areas of concern in relation to other bodies of literature. Rather, the understandings developed regarding the issues revealed in Chapters Six, Seven, Eight and Nine, are now revisited in order to generate further understandings.

10.3 FURTHER ANALYSIS OF ISSUES OF CONCERN FOR KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The Doctor of Education degree is concerned primarily with contributing to the improvement of practice. Consequently, it was appropriate that the results regarding the third research question were further analysed with this focus in mind. Borrowing from the ideas of Winter (1982), the issues identified by the HBL support-group leaders in relation to the third research aim can be classified into three levels according to the perceived effect that they could have on them in supporting the HBL community in WA. These levels are labelled ‘inconveniences’, ‘impediments’ and ‘impending threats’. ‘Inconveniences’ refer to issues that are irritating, but do not generate great concern. The perception is that supporting the HBL community in WA would be easier
without having to contend with them. ‘Impediments’ are issues that can be tolerated in the short term, but need to be sorted out eventually. ‘Impending threats’ are issues that, if not addressed soon, have the potential to seriously threaten the delivery of support to the HBL community in WA. Each level will now be considered in turn.

During this higher order analysis, the themes, sub-themes and properties generated in each area of concern were revisited. Regarding some areas of concern, for example ‘various characteristics of HBL community’ most themes fall in one level and only one property falls on another level. An example of this is ‘age of children’ under ‘family circumstances’ regarding ‘demographics’. Supporting a specific age group of children, namely teenagers, is regarded an impediment while all the demographics-related issues are considered inconveniences.

10.3.1 Inconveniences

This first level of issues that has a perceived impact on the work undertaken by the HBL support-group leaders in supporting the HBL community in WA, is labelled ‘inconveniences’. These are issues recognised by the HBL support-group leaders as being irritating, but which have little immediate impact on their work. Rather, they are issues which are usually part-of-life in an HBL support organisation. They relate to the various character of the HBL community, to insurance, to finances, to terminology, to inclusivity, to homeschool graduate support, to equal access to services, to scepticism toward authorities, and to national and State legislation.

The first inconvenience relates to the various characteristics of the members of the HBL community that the leaders serve. The geographical spread of the community throughout WA is challenging for leaders of central support organisations like HBLN and requires the establishment of local organisations linked to the central organisation in order to function effectively. The HBL community is also various regarding the
motivation of families for homeschooling. This also presents challenges regarding support for the HBL community, individual HBL families and groups with a specific HBL focus.

The second inconvenience relates to insurance and other legal requirements. While insurance is considered a necessity for the effective support of the HBL community, it can also have a negative impact on the community. In addition to increased cost, administrating the processes around insurance can be time consuming. The result is that some groups operate without insurance.

The third inconvenience faced by the HBL community in WA relates to finance. Most HBL families are single-income families who have to manage their money prudently. Even though homeschooling is not subsidised, HBL parents are grateful that they have the choice to home-educate their children. Furthermore, they prefer not to receive money from the government if it means that restrictions are not put on them regarding the education of their children. Also, the HBL community finds it difficult to attract grants. Families and HBL support groups would welcome grants from local organisations, as well as donations to subsidise specific HBL activities.

The fourth inconvenience relates to the wide range of terminology in use describing this alternative form of education. It is held that variations in the terms used make it difficult to identify support groups. HBLN has attempted to address this issue by creating the name Home-Education WA (HEWA) for use alongside that of HBLN.

The fifth inconvenience is the inclusive position adopted by HBLN and some other HBL support groups. Some homeschoolers in WA would prefer to socialise in a more exclusive, mostly faith-based community.
The sixth inconvenience has to do with homeschool graduates and their parents moving out of homeschool support when they come to the end of their homeschooling journey. It is held that these persons could offer valuable support to new homeschoolers or to homeschoolers entering a new phase of education.

The seventh inconvenience is that homeschooling children cannot get access to support services available to children in ‘regular’ schools such as speech therapy, psychologists and help with learning problems like dyslexia or ADHD. Despite acknowledging the need for these services, the HBL support-organisation leaders in WA, are aware that they have to make sacrifices because they made the choice to educate their children outside the normal system.

The eighth and ninth inconveniences both have to do with various State authorities, and are ‘scepticism toward authorities’ and ‘national and State legislation’. The political climate in Australia and how legislation changes may affect them create uncertainty amongst the HBL community. However, at the stage this study took place, they only consider this issues as inconveniences.

10.3.2 Impediments

The second set of issues that has a perceived impact on the work done by the HBL support-group leaders in supporting the HBL community in WA can be entitled ‘impediments’. These are issues that interfere with the leaders’ ability to support the HBL community in WA in the best, or most efficient manner. The HBL support-group leaders bewail that they do not have the infrastructure in the form of volunteer resources to address these issues. They include such matters as ‘relationships with Department of Education’, ‘misunderstanding of functions of HBLN’, ‘negative view by school principals and teachers’, ‘special-needs families’, ‘local level support’, ‘HBLN finances’, ‘IT literacy’, ‘HBL teenagers’, ‘future pathways’ and ‘venues’.
The first of the impediments participants identified pertains to the relationship with the Department of Education in WA, and more specifically its moderators. Although some of the leaders at the time the study reported here was conducted, described this relationship as satisfactory and better than before, they also held that there is always room for improvement. The improved relationship is ascribed to the HBLN committee members making an effort to establish and keep up communication with the Department. The leaders, however, are concerned about whether their right to home-educate will be respected in the future and how future legislation changes may influence the HBL community. They would also like to see an improved understanding of homeschooling on the part of some moderators. Furthermore, they would like to see that a uniform set of evaluation criteria and instruments be developed in consultation with all stakeholders. Finally, they would like to have statistics on HBL produced by the Department of Education to be separated out from those on school-refusers.

The second impediment identified is related to misunderstanding of the functions of HBLN leading to unrealistic expectations of the organisation by members of the HBL community. It is held by leaders that many homeschoolers do not understand that HBLN is run solely by a few homeschooling volunteers. The result is that they have expectations of the organisation that the committee cannot provide. It is especially held that those who homeschool because they believe their circumstances left them with no option have particularly high expectations regarding the provision of classes and services to replace school for them. However, while HBLN leaders acknowledge this need in the HBL community, they are not in a position to address it. Indeed, HBLN does not currently consider it as being one of its functions. Neither does it have the resources to provide in this regard. Rather, the hope of the HBLN committee members is that they can enable, motivate and facilitate the formation of new groups to provide the needed services.
The third impediment raised by the leaders is related to the perceived negative perception about homeschooling which exists in the non-homeschooling community, especially amongst institutional school personnel. The leaders consider most school principals and teachers to have a negative view of HBL and to lack an appreciation of home-education as a legal form of education in WA. The stated reason for this perception is that the ‘regular’ school personnel have very limited knowledge and experience about homeschooling as an educational approach. The HBL support-group leaders would like to see this perception changed.

The fourth impediment is related to the fact that many HBL families homeschool because their children have special needs. These can include autism, Asperger’s Syndrome, anxiety, depression, and physical illness. HBLN leaders would like to improve their support for this group, but currently do not have the necessary resources. The situation for families is aggravated by the HBL community not having access to support services available to children in ‘regular schools’ and the responsibility of duty of care resting on the parent during co-op sessions or group classes.

The fifth impediment identified by the leaders is related to a lack of availability of effective local-level support for the HBL community in WA. At the time the study reported here was being conducted a few homeschooling parents had volunteered to be local contact people in different geographical areas. These persons were not always very effective. This could be addressed, it was suggested by some leaders, by establishing a more extended local support system with regular contact taking place with the HBLN coordinator and through regular meetings.

The sixth impediment is the financial situation of HBLN. All HBLN’s funds come from membership fees and event payments. The organisation needs more money to keep
functioning. The leaders, they held, are looking for ways to raise money to improve their services.

The seventh impediment identified by the leaders is related to the poor IT literacy of some HBL parents. It is held that it is difficult to effectively communicate with HBL parents who prefer not to use the internet and social media on a regular basis. These members also often do not have access to the information and electronic/internet resources made available by HBLN on its website. Furthermore, they miss out on sharing, and contributing, to the HBL community because they do not participate in webinars and live internet discussion groups. This situation is amplified when the member is located in a rural area and in danger of feeling isolated.

The eighth impediment has to do with HBL teenagers. It is held by the leaders that it is especially difficult to support this group. Despite increasing numbers of HBL teenagers in WA, they are still relatively few in number compared to younger homeschoolers. They tend to have less social contact because they do not attend activities as regular as do younger homeschoolers. Reasons given for this are that their level of work requires more individual engagement and they prefer to keep working on their own projects rather than participating in social events like HBLN Sports Days, which they consider to be aimed primarily at younger children. HBLN does organise regular evening meetings for teenagers, but due to the geographical spread of the location of the teenagers, many of them also do not attend these.

The ninth impediment is uncertainty about future pathways for HBL graduates. In 2014 the HBLN coordinator went to great lengths to identify and share information regarding possible future pathways for HBL graduates with the HBL community, especially about transition to university. However, this information, it was held by some leaders, does not reach moderators.
The tenth impediment relates to obtaining appropriate venues for homeschool activities and meetings. The leaders hold that such venues should be large enough to cater for the group and the activity for which it would be used. It should also be cost-effective and safe. Some of the leaders also held that having a permanent central resource centre would benefit the HBL community.

### 10.3.3 Impending threats

The third level of issues that have a perceived impact on the work of the HBL support organisations can be entitled ‘impending threats’. These are issues which the participants feel might have a significant impact on the support provided for the HBL community in WA in the future if they are not dealt with soon. The issues identified are ‘lack of volunteers’, ‘little interest in serving on HBLN committee’, ‘membership of HBLN’, ‘succession planning’ and ‘emotional load and burnout’.

The first threat identified by HBL support-group leaders is the lack of volunteers to help run services and activities for the HBL community in WA. The HBL community, and their needs, have been growing at an exceptional rate. The current volunteers are not able to manage the increased workload and need the help of new volunteers in different areas. The HBLN committee and coordinator could organise more and a wider range of activities if they had more volunteers supporting them. Without them, however, services and activities, they hold, will have to be cancelled. It is acknowledged that the size, diversity and the geographically wide-spread nature of the HBL community contribute to the complexity of supporting it and therefore may make volunteering unattractive. Support-group leaders are also concerned that when the task of volunteering always falls on the shoulders of the same people, they are in danger of burnout and of departing from the HBL support environment.
The second threat identified by the HBL support-group leaders that is considered an impending threat relates to the commitment of members of the HBL community to serve on the HBLN committee. This issue relates to the previous one regarding a lack of volunteers. It is acknowledged that HBLN is an ever-evolving organisation, adapting its services to best serve the HBL community in WA. The HBL support-group leaders are concerned that not enough people want to volunteer to serve on the committee. Thus, the task of running HBLN is left to only a few people. While the current committee and HBLN coordinator are committed and competent, they do not have enough people to assist them and who are willing to succeed them. It is also acknowledged that special skills and knowledge are needed to fulfil some of the functions the HBLN committee provides. For example, a person representing the HBL community in negotiations with the Department of Education in WA, needs to be knowledgeable about all forms of homeschooling. Because of this situation, HBLN cannot offer as many and as wide a range of services to the HBL community as it would like. Also the current committee is in danger of becoming emotionally overloaded and burnt-out.

The third threat regarding the support of the HBL community in WA has to do with membership of HBLN. Not all members of the HBL community in WA are members of HBLN. Indeed, many non-members participate in activities organised by HBLN, but prefer not to take up membership. Higher membership numbers would make HBLN stronger, and possibly give it more voice when dealing with authorities and bargaining power when negotiating with product and service providers.

The fourth threat regarding the support of the HBL community in WA relates to succession planning for HBLN. As organisation consisting of volunteers serving their community, it is difficult to plan for the future. If an effective succession strategy is not developed, the organisation is in danger of having to close down leaving the HBL community in WA without a state-wide representative. At the time the study reported
here was conducted, very few people were willing to serve on the HBLN committee. The HBLN coordinator, fulfilled a valuable role in the running the organisation and was considered “the backbone of the association”. If for whatever reason, she has to resign, the organisation will struggle to provide the same services.

The fifth threat regarding the support of the HBL community in WA, is ‘emotional load and burnout’ of HBL support-group leaders. This threat is exaggerated by the other four threats identified, namely ‘lack of volunteers’, ‘little interest in serving on HBLN committee’, ‘membership of HBLN’ and ‘succession planning’. Many HBL support-group leaders may experience burnout and may not be in a position to support the HBL community effectively because not enough HBL members volunteer to be involved in the support of the community.

In Table 10.2 below, the results of the study as presented in Table 10.1 are reinterpreted to accommodate the higher order of analysis.

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<tr>
<th>Areas of Concern</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sub-themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Various Characteristics of HBL Community</td>
<td>Demographics</td>
<td>Numbers, Growth, Geographical spread, Family circumstances</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Motivation for homeschooling</td>
<td>Motivation to start homeschooling, Homeschool focus, Educational philosophies</td>
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<td>The nature of the students</td>
<td>Different stages of homeschooling, Academic abilities, Special needs, Challenges</td>
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<td>The nature of the parents</td>
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Table 10.2: Reinterpretation of Issues of Concern for HBL Support-Group Leaders in WA to Accommodate the Higher Order of Analysis

Inconveniences | Impediments | Impending threats

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<tr>
<th>Areas of Concern</th>
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<th>Sub-themes</th>
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<td>Various State Authorities</td>
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<td>• National and State legislation</td>
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<td>• The Department of Education in WA</td>
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<td>• Future pathways for HBL graduates</td>
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| HBLN as an organisation | Volunteers | • HBLN being run by too few volunteers  
• Reasons for not volunteering  
• Current situation regarding volunteering on the HBLN committee  
• Efforts to attract more volunteers |
| | HBL community in WA not fully aware of HBLN’s functions | • Leadership of HBLN  
• Services not provided by HBLN |
| | Management | • Not enough committee members  
• High turnover of committee members  
• Need for long-serving committee members  
• Spreading the leadership responsibility  
• Characteristics of HBLN committee members  
• Cost  
• Unawareness of the functions and value of HBLN  
• Needs are met elsewhere  
• Prefer less inclusive groups  
• Not value for money  
• Insurance costs and administration  
• Unregistered home-schoolers |
| | Membership | • Expenses  
• Income  
• Growing need for services |
| | Finances | • Succession planning  
• Accessibility of HBLN  
• Communication | • Members not reading HBLN newsletters  
• Technology and social media resistance |
| | Community involvement in HBLN-run activities | • HBLN members not attending HBLN organised events  
• Non-HBLN members attending HBLN events |

10.4 THE MATTER OF TRANSFERABILITY

The aims of the study reported in this thesis were to develop understandings about the historical background to HBL support groups in WA and in particular of HBLN, the only State-wide HBL support organisation, the functions of HBLN in meeting the diverse needs of the HBL community in the State, and issues of concern to leaders of these groups in WA in carrying out their functions. The research was designed to focus on discovery, insight and understanding from the perspective of the leaders of HBL
support organisations in WA, thus contributing to the knowledge-base and practice of HBL in WA. The results of a study of such a unique phenomenon are limited to the extent to which they can be considered transferable. Transferability refers to the “extent to which findings of one study can be transferred to other situations” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223).

This study is restricted to the HBL leaders who participated and is not representative of the entire HBL population in WA. Although HBLN, like most other HBL support groups in WA, is open to all HBL families in the State, not all homeschoolers in WA choose to be involved with these organisations. Nevertheless, since the study investigated the functions of HBLN, and the concerns of HBL support-group leaders within the WA locality, it provides a small but significant set of insights.

At the same time, the results should be considered of interest to leaders of other HBL communities in Australia and overseas, even though none of them are operating under the same conditions as prevail in WA. This is to recognise that they could be transferable in the sense that readers may draw upon them to inform their understanding of their own situation. On this, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended the provision of a “thick description of the sending context so that someone in a potential receiving context may assess the similarity between them and the study” (p. 126). Such an approach, as O’Donoghue (2007) explains, can assist readers “to relate to the study and perhaps gain an understanding of their own and others’ situations” (p. 66). This suggests that readers can potentially ‘transfer’ the understandings generated by the research to their own situation and identify points of comparison and contrast. The responsibility for making connections between the findings and other situations resides with the reader. The readers decide whether some or all of the findings are transferable to their own situation.
Other HBL support organisations around the world can also employ the understandings generated by this study as a basis to reflect upon their own situation. Further, the development of insights into HBL provided by the study can serve as a benchmark against which future practitioners and researchers can mark progress. The insights could also form the basis for further discussion on the HBL phenomenon. Equally, similar studies could be conducted in other regions of Australia and in other countries to reveal the perspectives of HBL support-organisation leaders on the issues involved in supporting the HBL communities in their regions.

10.5 IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The results of the study reported in this thesis have implications for further research in the substantive area of HBL support in WA. This position is supported by the view of Strauss and Corbin (1990), who contend that researchers who ground their research in the everyday actions and interactions of individuals within substantive areas of study do so in the hope that their findings will, along with related studies, contribute to a cumulative understanding within their area of research, and that the implications of their results will have useful applications. Accordingly, it is hoped that the results presented in this thesis may result in the pursuance of further research which may, in turn, lead to the development of a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon of HBL support.

The results on the first two research questions provide a framework within which issues of concern for HBL support-group leaders can be contextualised and be understood more clearly. The remainder of this section considers some implications arising out of the findings of Research Question Three.
10.5.1 Implications of the Results on Research Question Three for Practice

The results related to Research Question Three can provide insights for practise in different areas of HBL support in WA. A number of these areas are now considered.

10.5.1.1 Implications for Administration

- HBL support organisations in WA are challenged by the needs of the large, growing and diverse HBL community in WA.

- HBL support organisations need more volunteers to fulfil all their functions.

- The HBL community needs to be made aware of the organisational structure of HBLN and the role volunteers play in supporting the community.

- HBL families homeschooling children with special needs require more support than other families.

- Parents who do not necessarily want to homeschool, but have to because their children do not ‘fit into' regular school, need to be educated about what HBL entails, what their own responsibilities are, and the types of support available.

- Experienced HBL families, especially parent-teachers, should be encouraged to provide valuable support to new HBL families.

- The support at the local level should be improved to help new homeschoolers to more easily adjust to the homeschooling lifestyle.

- Paid positions can be created on HBL support group

- Leaders of smaller local HBL support groups should be encouraged to play a valuable role within HBLN by acting as two-way link between the local HBL community and HBLN.
10.5.1.2 Implications for Leadership

- Considering the size and diversity of the homeschool community in WA, it is clear that it is challenging to support them. Effective HBL support leaders should be knowledgeable about all ways of homeschooling and the diverse needs of the entire HBL community in order to represent them on different forums.

- The HBLN leadership consists of volunteer homeschooling parents. HBLN needs to attract more volunteers to serve on its committee. Also, the leadership responsibilities can be shared. This can be done in two ways. First, the leadership of smaller, local and specific groups could form a lower level of HBLN leadership by regular two-way communication with the central committee. Secondly, individuals or groups can take on the organisation of specific events for the entire HBL community in WA under the protection of HBLN.

- If the HBLN committee found it difficult to attract volunteers to serve as committee members, paid positions should be considered an option to ensure that the organisation continue to support the HBL community in WA.

- Homeschoolers should be helped to become aware of insurance issues affecting their activities. HBLN provides and helps administrate insurance for its members.

- The perceived negative perception about homeschooling amongst the general public, school personnel and professionals can be addressed. This can be done by increased involvement of the HBL community within the non-homeschooling community in WA, and by ensuring factually correct media coverage of homeschooling in WA.
• Turnover of HBLN committee members should be kept low to ensure that relationships committee members forge inside and outside the HBL community are maintained.

• The HBLN committee members are also well-positioned to talk to different audiences as representatives of the HBL community in WA. Different audiences can include the general public, government, groupings within the HBL community, and the media. The more members HBLN have, the more ‘voice’ it will have amongst the various audiences.

### 10.5.1.3 Implications for Policy

• The Department of Education should, in collaboration with HBL support-group leaders, develop a uniform set of home-education evaluation standards to be used by the home-education moderators when dealing with HBL families.

• HBL families and support-group leaders would welcome financial support, but would not want to be adversely affected due to the financial support. They do not want restrictions placed on homeschoolers as a consequence of HBL families, HBLN or other HBL service providers getting funding. HBL families would welcome other ways of allowing homeschoolers to have some kind of financial help for educational purposes. One way suggested by participants was through Centrelink payments. Families do not want to be adversely considered because the dad is working and mum is at home.

### 10.5.1.4 Other implications

• HBL support groups needs to keep in mind that HBL members will travel far distances to attend engaging activities organised by them.
Sufficient curriculum opportunities are available, but should be shared within the HBL community. HBL parents experienced in the use of specific curriculum resources are well-positioned to share their experiences with HBL parents setting out to find appropriate resources.

During teacher preparation, prospective teachers in WA can be made aware of the role HBL plays in the State as well as the different educational approaches HBL families follow. This may create a better understanding and hopefully appreciation for home-education as a legal form of education in WA.

10.5.2 Implications of the Research Findings for Further Research

The results of the study reported in this thesis also suggest areas for further research aimed at promoting a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon of HBL in WA. Despite Bishop’s (1991) call 25 years ago for further studies to describe, analyse and interpret HBL support groups at local, State and national level to better understand the home-schooling phenomenon, very few research projects in the interim have focused on the support of the HBL community. Even though this study contributes to the body of professional literature on homeschooling, other aspects of the homeschooling practice in general, and HBL support specifically, need to be rigorously researched. This sentiment is echoed by various researchers (Harding, 2011; Reilly, 2007; Stevens, 2001; Van Schalkwyk, 2010). An Australian study (Harding, 2011) identified four home-educator roles homeschooling parents take on, namely the role of learner, partner, teacher and advocate. Further research can be undertaken in how HBL support relates to each of these roles.

In particular, it would be useful to engage in research in the following areas:
10.5.2.1 Research Related to Administration

- Determining the feasibility of establishing a resource centre for homeschoolers in WA;
- Identifying effective ways to involve the HBL community as volunteers;
- Increasing HBLN membership;
- Identifying ways that HBLN can increase its finances without adding to the workload of homeschooling parent-teachers;
- Understanding why families who had never considered HBL came to decide to remove their children from school and how these families can best be supported;
- Establishing effective ways for HBLN to communicate with members of the HBL community;
- Preventing, or coping with, emotional burn-out within the HBL community;
- Supporting parents of HBL students with special needs, including research on developing strategies to provide them with respite or recuperation time.

10.5.2.2 Research Related to Leadership

- Identifying effective ways to communicate within the HBL community;
- Developing a succession strategy for HBLN as a not-for-profit organisation, run by volunteers;
- Promoting understanding of HBL within the wider WA environment.
10.5.2.3 Research Related to Policy

- Examining the relationship between homeschoolers and Department of Education of WA moderators;

- Examining the perspectives of moderators on their function and issues of concern in monitoring homeschoolers in WA;

- Improving the efficiency of moderators by enabling them to support and advise the HBL community;

- Improving collaboration between the Department of Education and HBL support-group leaders;

- Developing understandings about unregistered HBL families in WA. This can include investigating reasons why these families do not register with the Department of Education.

10.5.2.4 Research Related to Curriculum

- Developing understandings about the support needs of HBL families following different learning approaches, which range from highly structured, curriculum-driven ‘school-at-home’ to unstructured, child-led, delight-driven learning.

- Providing assistance for homeschoolers to find a balance between doing their own thing and complying with government regulations.

10.6 CONCLUSION

This final chapter of the thesis provided an overview of the study, provided a further analysis of the issues of concern for stakeholders, discussed the matter of potential transferability of the findings and listed recommendations arising from the research findings for policy, practice and future research. The study is the first research project to
have HBL support groups in WA as a focus. It generated understandings in an area where no such understandings previously existed and contributes to the knowledge base of the HBL field in WA. These understandings have relevance for HBL families, those supporting home-based learners, and educational leaders in WA. The understandings can assist HBLN as an organisation, HBL families in WA, other HBL organisations, school authorities and the State education agencies in coming to understand, and communicate about, the HBL phenomenon.
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