



REVIEWING HOME EDUCATION LITERATURE: DOES IT MATTER WHERE WE LEARN?

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Abstract:

The last 20 years has seen a global increase in studies investigating various aspects of Home Education (HE) and the physical location of learning in relation to schooling; the physical location of learning outside of schooling remains under researched. This paper provides a review of some, but not all, of the existing literature, leading us to see where there are potentially gaps in the research as well as gaps in the opportunities for creative methodologies. The review starts with Home Education within the context of Scottish/UK education history and policy. It should be noted that at present there are very few differences between Scottish Home Education Policy and that from Westminster. Then we move to the exploration into Education Capital and how Bourdieu's theories and ideas may or may not apply in the Home Education context. Firstly, this review finds that there is a very limited body of research that is specifically concerned with the voice of the home-educated children, who experience and live learning, in alternative provision; secondly this review notes the limited number of studies concerned with just what education means, to home educating families, or the value they place upon education in spaces outside of schools. It cannot be assumed that because a family have chosen to home educate, that the decision was entirely ideological. Very briefly, due to the recent lockdown of March 2020 onwards, a small amount of research is included following Covid-19 and the nationwide Home Education of most of the children in the UK. Strikingly, and despite how new this research is, the value of education within the home is still missing from core topics as is for the most part, the coproduction of data with the children's voices at the heart of Home Education research.

Keywords: home education; home schooling; child's voice; education; value

Terminology

In the UK, Home Education is quite often used interchangeably with Home Schooling, however those families who choose to Home Educate quite often will argue that Home

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Schooling is completely different. The difference, for clarity, is usually down to the *replication of school in the home environment*.

For this article:

- Home Education is defined as *education in all forms that exists outside of schooling where all experiences are classified as educational*.
- Home Schooling is defined as *a replication of modern schooling (& school days) that takes place outside of a school building and occurs*

1. Introduction

If parents and children value educational experiences; if engagement with those educational experiences is high and children's learning helps them to thrive, does it really matter where those experiences are taking place? (Lees 2011, Lees 2013, Lees and Nicholson 2017) suggest that many educationalists struggle to grasp a firm understanding of education outside of a schooling system. This lack of an understanding has the potential to spill over into conflict between parents, schools and local authorities (Seith 2012, Foster and Danechi 2019, Mukwamba-Sendall 2019).

This Literature Review forms part of a larger study into how home educating families value education within the spaces they create and how the value they place on those spaces contributes to education capital within the family.

The nuance of the wider study considers the possibility for education capital to form and reproduce slightly differently; as adults and children experience learning side-by-side, is it possible that capital is reproduced from child to adult rather than the more popular belief stemming from Bourdieu's work, that capital is reproduced from adult to child.

The findings of the wider study have the potential to offer an entirely different pedagogical approach to alternative educational provision, and one where adults can increase their education capital at the same time as children.

1.1 UK

This Literature Review investigates existing work in and around Home Education. The intention in undertaking the literature review, was to identify areas where there is a gap in our current understanding of Home Education. The review finds that several gaps in the research exist as well as some areas where only a small amount of research has been done. This led us to look at, if and how research within the field of socio-cultural theory and Home Education had taken place. Consideration is given to the work of Bourdieu and the reproduction of capital. Home Education research has increased significantly and steadily over the past 30 years, however, this review highlights that some aspects have been researched over and above others, for example why parents choose Home Education (Rothermel 2003, Morton 2010, Spiegler 2010), potentially leaving the Home Education sector with a significant deficit, and an imbalance of understanding of Home Education across the UK. Maybe most significantly, the home educated child's voice has been left unheard.

Over the past 30 years there has been an influx of papers, some generated from several doctoral thesis, that investigate various aspects of Home Education (D'Arcy 2012, Nelson 2014, Jones 2016, Burke and Cleaver 2019, Ryan 2019). Subjects have included pedagogy and curriculum (Liberto 2016); reasons why parents choose Home Education (Beck 2010; Morton 2010; Rothermel 2002; Nuhula et al 2019; Spiegler 2010); home schooling and Home Education comparisons (Amber-Fensham Smith 2020); SEN & Home Education; Registration (Rothermel 2010); Off-rolling and behaviour (Burke n.d.); Parents Roles in Home Education (Harding 2011); relationships between Local Authorities and HE Parents (Eddis 2007; Petrie 1992); Religion, Culture and HE (English 2016); History of Home Education (Firmin & Wilhelm 2009) and Self-esteem and achievement (Ray 1991; Rothermel 1999; Shyers 1992).

All these studies add to a growing plethora of material that might assist the wider professionals in education, to better understand the purpose and nature of Home Education.

What this existing research does not do so well, is to listen to, acknowledge and document, the child(ren's) voice(s). One might argue that efforts have been made to include children, however opportunities have been limited and the primary focus has been on the relationship between researcher and adult participant.

2. The Scottish Context

One does not need to go far to find an abundance of research conducted during the 2020-2021 pandemic, across the UK, see for example (Benzeval, Borkowska et al. 2020, Pensiero, Kelly et al. 2020, Wilson 2021). What is significant for our study, is the history of alternative education that existed early in the 20th Century (Kennedy 2018), in and around Scotland. Very little turned up during the review of literature, that investigated the Scottish context and yet discussions and debates surrounding Home Education in Scotland in many ways mirror those in Westminster, see for example (HC_Deb 27 April 2018, Parliament 28 June 2018)

Perhaps the most significant research to be found, related to historical 'experiments' conducted by John Aitkenhead and A.S. Neill. In much the same way as Home Education discussed above, early alternatives to the existing state schooling were devised and attempted in Scotland, by individuals looking to improve the life chances and educational experiences of young people. The work of A.S Neill remains current and attempts have been made to incorporate the freedoms he wanted to observe; that they become the learning reality of today (Learn 2020, Neill 2020). Whilst successive Governments in England and Scotland have dictated the need for discipline and order, Neill's approach advises the need for self-governing and personal responsibility; aspects that can also be observed in Home Education spaces (Neuman and Guterman 2017, Burke and Cleaver 2019)

Kennedy (2018) argues that John Aitkenhead and his colleagues (A. S. Neill) were 'ahead of their time' particularly as Aitkenhead (Aitkenhead 1986) was advocating for

outdoor learning, the learning of life skills and his school, Kilquhanity, favoured a flexible and free curriculum model (Kennedy 2018):

“This is the real fun for children. But far more important is that these activities lay the foundations of mental health” (p154)

Unfortunately, the school that is often referred to as an experiment, did not last and ran into financial difficulties relatively quickly, however, Aitkenhead did lay some of the foundations that still exist within the Scottish education system today. That being said, if parents wish to educate their children within a more flexible framework and curriculum, where children make their own choices and learn the freedoms of self-governance and independent responsibility (Kennedy 2018), it might be argued that their only option is to Home Educate. This does beg the question of Scottish education, where is the educational choice for child and parent? This question could easily be asked of the UK as a whole. It is difficult to note that some might argue very little has changed since A. S. Neill opened his autobiography with,

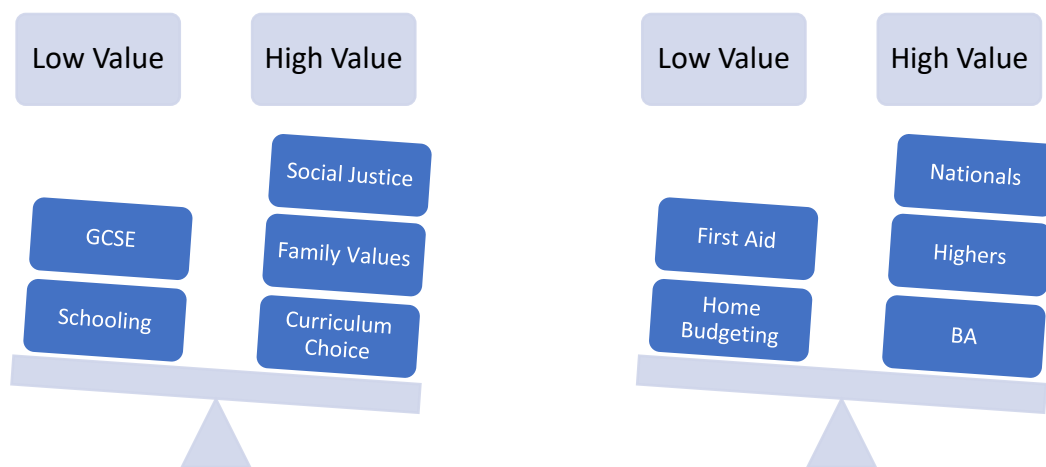
“If I am to be remembered at all, I hope it will be because I tried to break down the gulf between the young and the old, tried to abolish fear in schools, tried to persuade teachers to be honest with themselves and drop the protective armour they have worn for generations as a separation from their pupils” (Neill 1973. p. xii)

2.1 Their Value of Education

Value has a slippery definition. To some value is entirely financial, a monetary value. To look for a definition for *Value* one must look to Economics for a short time, and to a concept called *Subjective Theory* (Hull 1932). The economic context is less important to this study than the concept of how we as individuals attribute value.

Economists define *Subjective Theory* (Hicks and Allen 1934) as being ‘the value placed upon a *thing* by an individual’; this value is subjective because every individual applies extrinsic factors (external influences) to the *thing* as well as intrinsic factors (internal, individual influences); our response to a question like *How much do you value education*, is unique and individual. What one person values, another may not. We choose. A choice as to what we value and what we do not, may be similar someone else’s, but may also be completely different (Figure 1).

Figure 1: A visual representation of how some families value different areas of learning and education. The content would be unique to each family and the content of this diagram is just one example of many



To some extent, subjective theory exists in most of our lives (San-Jose and Retolaza 2021). In education, one parent may place high value upon the certificates that children attain and the career prospects that might come later as a result. Another parent may place no value at all on certification but place high value on immersive education where a child can engage with a project for as long as they want to, valuing a holistic approach to education.

Defining value is difficult “because the concept of value does not have a universally accepted method or theory that prescribes a consistent approach for determining it” (By Julie M. Meehan 2015). The one aspect of value that has the potential to exist both in Home Education families and Schooling families, is the *value defined by benefits received* (p302). Schooling families might value the academic capital gained from 10-12years of schooling; a Home Educating family may value the life-experience gained from being educated somewhere other than a school.

Both schooling and home educating families may be placing value on education because of the benefits they perceive to be coming as the children mature (benefits received).

Some home educating families value the perceived, or real, freedoms that educating from home brings (Rothermel 2002, Rothermel 2003). Of course, not all families have chosen to home educate themselves, occasionally families share their experience of disaffection (Tara 2016) and others of off rolling (Foster and Danechi 2019, Long and Danechi 2019, Maxwell, Doughty et al. 2020).

We cannot assume that parents who choose schooling place significant value on education; we know from research (Mitchell 2020, Slater, Burton et al. 2020) into aspects such as parental decision making, choosing schools and opting for private education (Rothermel 2003, Spiegler 2010, Williams 2018, Baynton 2020) that there are indeed a group of parents who place high value on their children’s educational experiences (e.g. benefits received), there are also parents who do not value education as the answer to

their child's successful future, see for example (Dyson, Beresford et al. 2007, Torssander 2013). Based on this body of research it is likely that there are some home educating families who place a high degree of value on education and some, significantly less so.

2.2 Education Capital

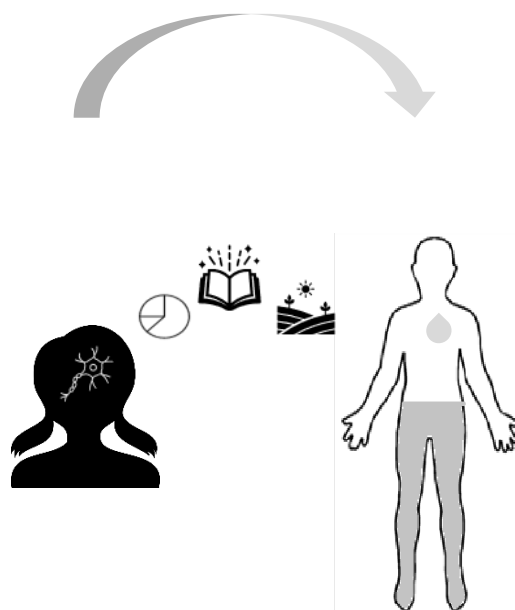
It is quite difficult to locate research that looks at education capital within a Home Education environment. Simple searches (for example, Home Education + Education Capital) return a significant number of business, finance and economics papers, but little on the capital generated and reproduced within Home Education. If every opportunity is decidedly a learning opportunity, one would anticipate that education capital for home educators may increase, however, we cannot define this increase without the research to support any conclusions. A significant change in recent months is the introduction of Cultural Capital to the Ofsted Inspections Handbook (Gov.UK 2019) multiple generations have already graduated from the UK schooling system and yet mention of cultural capital for future success has only just been entered as a requirement for a school to be graded Good or above. The importance of Cultural Capital as defined by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1973, Bourdieu 1984, Harker 1990) initially and more recently by researchers of educational success (Barnard 2020, Breinholt and Jæger 2020), is an aging concept that may have benefited the past three or four generations. If we then consider the reproduction of capital (Collins 2009) as a concept, one might argue that if past generations were not able to increase cultural capital whilst in the schooling system, they would not be able to share this effectively with their children; potentially the need to include capital as an inspection factor in 2020 was caused by the Government's failure to prioritize capital gains in the past. They ignored the importance of building educational capital, despite the work of Bourdieu and many researchers since, only now demanding that schools deliver to...

"...all pupils, particularly disadvantaged pupils ... the knowledge and cultural capital they need to succeed in life." (Gov.UK 2019)

This point is significant because it leaves families, particularly parents, in a position where they hold less education capital than they need to successfully reproduce capital in their children's favour; potentially. Questions are already being asked by policy makers about parents abilities to be successful in educating their children from home, (Staufenberg 2017, Williams 2018) even before the influx of research since the lockdown of 2020 (Reid 2020, Whittaker 2021). This is not unique to any single corner of the UK. Just as many questions are asked in Scotland as they are in Wales, Ireland and England.

If parents struggle with the reproduction of capital at home, due to their schooling experiences, it may be possible that concurrent learning is taking place as parents begin the journey of education from home; learning that is all the time building capital in the home. Arguably, family capital could be rising as *children reproduce their capital in favour of their parents* (Figure 3).

Figure 3



Transference of Education Capital from Child to Parent during the Home Education process; as the child is learning, it may be possible the adult is also learning thus increasing the education capital in the home.

3. Methodologies

The review of existing literature did not find a study that considered, as a priority or core research question, the voice of the home educated child. This a significant gap in the abundance of literature looking into Home Education.

Various methods have been utilised to elicit motives, curriculum choices and other equally important elements of knowledge from the somewhat fringe groups engaged in Home Education. Rebecca English chose a case study approach and discourse analysis when she investigated the reasons why parents chose Home Education in Australia (English 2015). Others have used qualitative interviews and thematic analysis (Bowers 2018). By far the most prolific methodology used in the Home Education research papers and chapters that were collected for this review, reported the use of Communities of Practice (CoP) as underpinning their methodology (Lave 1991, Barson 2004, Safran 2008, Safran 2010, Fensham-Smith 2017, Burke and Cleaver 2019).

Less research has been done that firstly considers the narratives of the home educated child, and secondly uses creative methods (see Photovoice for example) to support children in sharing their stories (Jones 2013, Fensham-Smith and Flack 2020). Creative methodologies have been tried and tested in a number of studies where participants are part of marginalised, fringe communities on the edge of the larger society; see for example (Wilson, Dasho et al. 2007, Simmonds, Roux et al. 2015, Latz 2017, Liebenberg 2018, Barry, Monahan et al. 2020, Malka 2020).

To assist young people, children and their families in sharing their voice, highlighting the value they place on education outside of the classroom and to offer some

evidence of the transference and reproduction of education capital in the Home Education spaces, creative methodologies could be employed by more researchers.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

About the Author

Chelle Oldham is a lecturer in education and teacher training. Chelle has been in Higher Education for over 15 years and has contributed to a number of educational standards reviews including the Nutbrown Review. Chelle has worked with QAA; Ofsted and a number of Higher Education Institutions since 2006. In addition, Chelle holds three teaching certificates and consequently she is qualified to teach each age, stage and phase of learning. Significantly, Chelle also Home Educates all of her children and experienced Home Education, Private and State Education herself as a child. This wealth of knowledge and experience not only benefits her students, but also gives her a unique perspective of the entire human educational experience. Chelle is currently involved in a number of research projects within Alternative Education Provision, has in the past researched children's privacy rights in print media and has edited an early childhood book series.

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