

# **Home Education: Exploring the views of parents, children and young people**

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## Abstract

This study explores the views and experiences of home educators, children and young people with regard to elective home education (EHE) practice and learning and its position in society. The outcomes of this provision are also examined. This study is topical due to the anecdotal evidence which suggests that home education or home schooling is growing in the UK and worldwide, and there is a resurgence of interest in home education in political and media discourse in the UK. Moreover, this study is also timely due to home education being an under-researched area generally, with children and young people's views rarely elicited.

The study found that the practices and activities pursued by EHE families were diverse, whether they were focused in the home or other environments. Even the respondents who followed or subscribed to a particular approach (i.e. structured; autonomous or semi-structured) had their own way of home educating which, in the main, focused on the child's interests and/or needs. The diversity of the practices followed also echoes the diversity of the sample population itself; home education was pursued for a wide range of reasons, although dissatisfaction with schools or established schooling ranked high among those reasons. The experiences and outcomes afforded by home education were on the whole positive but nonetheless challenges were mentioned with regards to support and funding for home educators and their families. Recommendations include greater awareness about EHE as a legal alternative to school; access to/and funding for exams; and increased training for Local Authority officials charged with overseeing or monitoring this area.

## **DEDICATION**

In loving memory of my Nan, Anna Fitzpatrick

‘Some people come into our lives and quickly go, some stay for a while and leave footprints on our hearts and we are never the same.’ (unknown)

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# 1 Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

‘Home-schooled children face ‘postcode lottery’ of official support, say MPs’ (The Guardian, 2012)

‘First official figures reveal failings of home education’ (TES, 2010)

‘More home education information needed, say inspectors (BBC, 2010)

‘Children’s Minister: Home education ‘may be cover for abuse’ (The Telegraph, 2009)

‘An inspector calls: Does mother or nanny know best?’ (The Economist, 2009)

These five media titles from five different publications summarise the questions, concerns or assumptions that resonate around elective home education (EHE) in the United Kingdom (UK). The term ‘home education’ is generally prefaced by the term ‘elective’ because it is used in government and policy documents (see Badman, 2009; Ofsted, 2010; DCSF, 2007) to indicate education that happens at home through choice. There are exceptions, however, such as children who are educated at home through illness or because of issues concerning school choice and appeal decisions. In these situations home education is used as a temporary stopgap and children remain on the school register or roll of their Local Authority (LA) (DCSF, 2007). Additionally, children may be educated at home for ‘cultural reasons’ because of concerns over racist bullying, differences in lifestyle/educational philosophy and cultural erosion (Ivatts, 2006; Bhopal and Myers, 2009).

The legal context is clear with regard to home education in the UK. Whilst education is compulsory, schooling is not (although not all countries adopt such liberal attitudes; EHE is severely restricted in countries such as the Netherlands and is de-facto illegal

in Germany). In England and Wales, however, Section 7 of the Education Act (1996) outlines that responsibility for a child's education rests with their parents and education can be provided at school or 'otherwise'. There is also no legal obligation for parents to notify their LA of their intention to home educate if their child has never attended school. When a parent decides to educate a child at home, the parent assumes financial responsibility for the child's education, and for the provision of an 'efficient education suitable to the age, ability and aptitude of the child' (see Mr Justice Woolf in the case of *R v Secretary of State for Education and Science, ex parte Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass School Trust*, 1985). In order to be satisfied that a child is receiving a suitable education, LAs may ask to meet with the family. However, there is no legal obligation for parents to allow the LA into their home or to see the child, nor is there a legal obligation for parents to follow the National Curriculum, or to provide a set number of hours of education.

Thus, while LAs have a duty to ensure that adequate education is being provided and to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in line with statutory legislation, they have limited powers in this area (see Chapter 2). Consequently, it is difficult to determine how many children are being home educated in England and Wales and the quality of education provided. Moreover, contributions to this field are of particular current importance as a recent review commissioned by the previous Labour Government into home education in England (Badman, 2009) identified the need for additional research in this area.

It is necessary, therefore, to provide a brief overview about the EHE context in the UK, and why it has gained widespread attention over recent years, particularly in the wake of the Badman Review (2009) and subsequent media coverage. The size and diversity of the population will be discussed first because it is important to outline what is known about the home educating community in terms of its population size and affiliated characteristics. The nature and practices of EHE are also summarised as are the outcomes of EHE. This will help 'set the scene' for the following sections which outline why I decided to choose this topic, the outline to the study and the aims of this research. The overall structure of the thesis is described in the final section of this chapter.

In the UK there is no reliable data on the number of children educated at home. Available statistics are inconsistent and there is no officially recognised source. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the figure lies somewhere between 40,000 to 85,000 and it is growing in popularity (Badman, 2009). Data on the gender, age and ethnicity of home educated children is also limited but research suggests that secondary age students tend to outnumber primary age students, that the gender spread is even and the home education population is made up of a wide variety of ethnic groups, although the majority are White British (Ofsted, 2010; DCSF, 2007). With regard to the motivations for home education, evidence suggests that parents home educate for a combination of reasons; they may be subject to change over time and are often inter-linked. The most common reason for EHE is focused on: dissatisfaction with schooling including bullying, provision for SEN and the quality of education and/or the curriculum offered (Morton, 2010; Rothermel, 2002, 2003).

There are few systematic studies relating to the nature and practice of EHE, namely how children learn at home and the resources used. The research available indicates that the methods of education vary from structured and 'formal' programmes to 'informal', less 'conventional' approaches to learning. (see DCSF, 2007). In one of the very few studies on the subject, *Educating at home*, with 100 home educating families in the UK and Australia, Thomas (1998) found that, whilst a variety of educating styles were to be found among home educators, there was, within this variation, a significant shift towards informal learning (Thomas, 1998). Parents found themselves gravitating away from structured learning and instruction (National Curriculum resources/text books) towards informal learning where children may be encouraged to pursue their own interests rather than being directed to subjects by adult educators. Even so, Thomas (1998) acknowledges that in many cases parents were using a mixture of formal and informal methods and the definitions of and perspectives on what constitutes 'formal' and 'informal' learning varied depending on their theoretical view point or pedagogical philosophy relating to learning and the nature and purpose of education. A detailed discussion about formal and informal learning is presented in the literature review.

The collective outcomes for home educated children in terms of their qualifications and employment is another important area of investigation where research is limited. However, the studies that are available suggest that home educated children perform well academically and are socially adept. A study with 419 EHE families conducted in 2002 found that 64% of reception aged children studied scored over 75% on the Performance Indicators of Primary School (PIPS) baseline assessment, compared to 5.1% of children nationally (Rothermel, 2002). In addition, a follow-up study conducted by Webb (1999) with 20 adults who had been home educated found that they were all employed in a variety of professions (although there was a slight bias towards the caring and creative industries) and of the 20, three had degrees from Oxford University. Also, the vast majority had no problem making friends and were involved in their wider community through participation in voluntary clubs and societies. Even so, despite these favourable outcomes, the results have to be treated with caution in line with EHE research generally. This is because samples are small and the diverse characteristics of home educating families make it difficult to generalise. The need for further empirical enquiry into this area was also outlined in the Badman Review (2009):

Evidence offered to this inquiry on the proportion of home educated young people who are in education, employment or training (NEET) was inconclusive. Again I believe further research is necessary that seeks information on progression to further and higher education and employment. (p36)

Thus, what is known about the home education population in terms of its size and diversity along with its associated practices and outcomes is limited. The reasons for this can be attributed to the fact that home education is a small but emerging area of research in the UK. Existing research on EHE, for example, has tended to be conducted by home educators (see Ray, 1990; Gaither, 2009; Fortune-Wood, 2007, among others) although there are exceptions (Lees, 2011). It is also a notoriously difficult community to access as funding bodies and research councils in the social sciences generally favour institutionally-based research that focuses on schools, colleges or universities (see Berliner, 2002; Donovan, 2007).

Having said that, however, there are many advantages to researching EHE precisely because it is an under-researched area and the possibilities for investigation are seemingly endless. In many ways this helped to affirm my decision to research EHE because I hoped to add to existing literature and to make a positive contribution to policy or practice in the field. However, I need to make clear that I am in no way suggesting that this research is going to be more valuable than a home educator's view; it is just going to be a 'different' perspective. It is also important to mention that the lack of research into EHE was not the only reason why I decided to pursue this area. My interest in this topic originated from my own schooling experience as summarised below.

## **1.2 Choice of topic**

Greenbank (2003), among others, emphasises that researchers should adopt a reflexive approach and attempt to be honest and open about how their values (personal and social) influence their choice of topic, study design, methods, collection and analysis of the data, and even the writing styles used. This was also the view held by McGraw *et al* (2000) who discussed ethics as one aspect of reflexivity:

Reflexivity is a process whereby researchers place themselves and their practices under scrutiny, acknowledging the ethical dilemmas that permeate the research process and impinge on the creation of knowledge. (p68)

Certainly in my case, the rationale underpinning the choice of topic (EHE) is important because it formed the basis of my study and also influenced the research design and the questions asked.

Like many researchers I decided to investigate EHE because I had an interest in the topic. Oakley (1979) also highlights that most researchers start from a point of personal concern and interest:

Academic research projects (often) bear an intimate relationship to the researcher's life....personal dramas provoke ideas that generate books and research projects. (p4)



In contrast, although I am interested in the topic it is not a topic that I have ever engaged with personally; I was not home educated nor am I a home educator. My interest in EHE stemmed for the most part from my own formative schooling experience, because although I enjoyed primary school and look back on it with fond memories, I cannot say the same about my secondary schooling. Hence I decided to pursue the topic of Educational Studies for my undergraduate (BA) degree; I wanted to learn more about education as a field of inquiry. Through studying this subject I became aware of EHE as a legal educational alternative to school and that set off a chain of events which led me to apply for ESRC funding and research this area. It is necessary, therefore, to summarise why I was dissatisfied with my secondary schooling because it ultimately reveals my interest in the field of education, specifically with regards to learning at home.

The reason for my dissatisfaction with my secondary schooling centred for the most part on my school's inherent preoccupation with streaming children into age ability groups. I acknowledge that this is a process fostered by many other schools. However, I found the system for streaming children unfair and inadequate. The system my school (a mixed Catholic Comprehensive in Birmingham) adopted was focused on the child's ability in maths and science which were my two weaker subjects. Consequently, I was put in middle to lower groups from Year 7 to Year 9 for all subjects, including humanity subjects where I always performed well. I remember as a child been frustrated about this because I was in groups with children who did not want to learn and with teachers who to a large extent had given up hope.

I vividly remember one Physics class in Year 9 where the teacher would give everyone lollies on the way into the class to try and appease the troublemakers; let's just say it didn't work! Another tactic my maths teacher employed to try and keep the troublemakers from misbehaving was to move the quiet and studious students onto their tables. Consequently, I ended up sitting between two loud boys to help their learning (no consideration was given to how it would affect my learning) and it was not an enjoyable experience. In the end, my mum ended up paying for a private maths tutor for me at weekends because I was learning so little in school due to the disruption.

The effects of streaming on my sense of self-worth and self-esteem were further compounded by the fact that my twin sister and practically all of my friends were in higher groups and as a consequence had different lunch sittings to me (there were two lunch sittings to ease congestion at lunch service). I felt that this made the situation even more intolerable because on occasions I had no one to sit with or talk to at lunch times. My mum knew I was not enjoying school (to put it mildly) and went in numerous times to try and remedy the situation and to explain to the Head Teacher, Deputy Head, Head of Year or anyone that would listen that I should be moved up in my stronger subjects, but it made no difference whatsoever.

The lightening bulb moment only came for my Head of Year when I achieved Level 7 in my English Literature, Year 9 SATS test without doing the extension paper (Level 7 was the highest mark you could get without doing the further paper). The majority of my English group gained Level 3s and 4s and he informed me that ‘I should not have been in that group’ as if it was something I didn’t already know. The results of my SATS tests certainly marked a turning point and from then on I was in middle to higher groups for all my GCSE subjects (and did very well incidentally).

My schooling experience certainly had a bearing on my interest in EHE, and I am sympathetic to those children who struggle in school or for whom schooling does not work.

### **1.3 Outline to the study**

This thesis is the product of a full-time programme of research funded by the ESRC which was carried out from October 2010 to October 2013. I was enrolled at the University of Birmingham during this time. Broadly, this study examined the views of parents, children and young people with regard to their home education experience. It is important to mention here that this thesis focuses on children who are educated at home through choice (EHE). It does not include children who are educated at home as a temporary stopgap (due to illness), nor does it include children who are EHE for cultural reasons (i.e. Traveller groups). The reasons for this are simple: previous

literature into EHE generally focuses on those children who are de-registered from school and Traveller groups have a long history of EHE.

An important aspect of this thesis is that children and young people's 'voices' are elicited alongside adults'. As mentioned, most of the research into EHE has focused on parents' views and their motivations for home educating their children, or professionals' views (see Morton, 2010; Parsons and Lewis, 2010; DCSF, 2007; Kendall and Atkinson, 2006, Rothermel, 2002, 2003). Access to the community is difficult and so consequently parents or other agencies are favoured. Further, there are many ethical considerations that have to be considered when conducting research with children which may dissuade researchers from engaging in this area, particularly when a great deal of time and resources have to be spent dealing with presumptions and scepticism directed at researchers who are 'outside' of the home educating community (see the Badman Review, 2009).

I therefore, made a conscious decision early on that networking and engaging with home educating groups both in England and abroad (the Netherlands) would be useful. This is because, as previously mentioned, I was not personally or professionally involved in this field prior to starting this research. Also, while I was clear that I wanted children and young people to take part in this study, I did not have an implicit focus or a set of research questions at the outset of this PhD. Instead, I wanted the questions to develop from the literature I read, experiences I encountered or from the people I spoke to.

I was also aware, that the vast majority of home educators and their families are members of EHE groups because they offer support and advice and can also be used to share expertise, resources or to foster socialisation opportunities (Thomas and Pattison, 2007). Even so, I did not anticipate at the outset of this research, how difficult it would be to gain access to home educating groups as an 'outsider' to the field (see Chapter 6 for more detail). Establishing trust and gaining 'access' to home education groups required sensitive and prolonged negotiations over a long period of time. Having said that, however, once access was granted to one home education group others followed.

The first home education group I attended was a local environmentally-focused group based in Shropshire. From there I established further contacts with other home education groups based locally (West Midlands) and internationally (I visited a ‘home learning’ group in the Netherlands). I also camped at the world’s largest gathering of home educating families in Milton Keynes (further detail about these groups are provided in Chapter 6). Attending and participating in these groups was immensely beneficial because it gave me wider insight into the community and also helped me clarify areas where further investigation would be useful.

## **1.4 The aims of the study**

As mentioned earlier, the aim of this thesis is concerned broadly with examining the views of parents, children and young people with regard to their home education experience. After establishing contacts with home educating individuals and their children, as well as networks of home educators both in England and abroad (see Chapter 4), I thought it necessary to provide a more comprehensive understanding about what is known about EHE. Currently there are considerable gaps in the research available. Moreover, what is known about EHE in the public domain is generally focused on adults’ views and conducted by home educators.

I decided, therefore, to investigate the ‘lived experiences’ of home educating families in order to find out: what led them to EHE; the resources and tools used; the benefits and limitations of this provision; how home educators and educatees<sup>1</sup> view its portrayal in society; and the affiliated outcomes of EHE. These areas were deemed noteworthy because of the lack of research available. Also, during my time talking to and being involved with EHE groups there was a sense that having further information about how children learn at home and the outcomes of EHE would be useful.

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<sup>1</sup> I am using the term educatees to refer to those who are educated at home

In short, this thesis is an empirical investigation into the views and experiences of home educating/educated parents, children and young people on topical and timely areas of interest. It is hoped that this work will contribute valuable insights into home education practice and provision as well as promote awareness about an area of education that has been largely overlooked by educators, academics and policy makers.

The participants who took part in this study were largely drawn from EHE groups in England. These groups provided access to my sample population and offered a platform for pursuing contacts with other home educators and their families. The Netherlands-based EHE group was not included in this study due to time and cost implications.

The methods utilised in this study were qualitative in nature (semi-structured and focus groups). They were deemed the most appropriate given the aims of the study and the sample population under investigation. With regard to the child participants, although interviews were utilised, child-friendly methods were also incorporated (written and visual) because they encouraged an explorative approach and were regarded as ‘fun’ by the participants.

This thesis is framed around the following research questions:

1. Why is home education undertaken by families?
2. How is home education practised?
3. What are the experiences of parents, children and young people who have been or are currently engaged in this provision?
4. What are the outcomes for home educated young people concerning qualifications and employment?
5. What are the views of parents, children and young people regarding how home education is perceived in society?
6. What changes would parents, children and young people like to see for home education moving forward?

## **1.5 Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is organised into three notional sections: the theoretical and empirical background to the research, its design and analysis and the presentation and discussion of the findings.

### **1.5.1 Background**

In order to provide justification for the research, Chapters 2 to 4 situate the research in a wider theoretical and empirical framework. Chapter 2 provides a national and international overview of home education and includes an examination of the historical, political and policy context of home education. Chapter 3 is informed by sociological, educational and political theories about the practice and regulation of home education and includes ideas about parental rights and choice in education. Furthermore, it draws on aspects of philosophy of education as home education raises questions about the role and nature of schools, education and learning. Chapter 4 examines the literature available on home education in the UK and worldwide in order to understand what is currently known about this area from the estimated population size to the outcomes of this provision. It also offers a critique of the research conducted in relation to its quality and evidence base and outlines why a wide variety of academic and media sources are utilised in this thesis for the purpose of aiding understanding.

### **1.5.2 Design/analysis of the study**

The design of the study through to its implementation and analysis are discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 begins with a consideration of the difficulties of gaining access to the home education population and continues by describing the research strategy pursued (case study) and its benefits and limitations for the study under investigation. Chapter 6 contains a description of the methods used to gather the research and describes how the study was piloted, the sample selected and the ethical considerations that were brought to the fore as a consequence of researching this area. The processes used to analyse the results are also explained.

### **1.5.3 Presentation and discussion of the results**

The aim of this section is to present and discuss the findings of the research. Chapters 7 to 12 are framed around individual research questions for the sake of clarity and understanding. Chapter 7 outlines the motivations for EHE and examines the rights and responsibilities arguments in relation to the right to educate and/or education. Chapter 8 describes the educational practices utilised by home educating families and how this informs learning and development. The socialisation opportunities afforded through home education are also critiqued as are the networking opportunities (virtual and personal) and their impact. Chapter 9 explores the experiences of the participants who have been or are currently involved in home education and the successes and challenges faced. Chapter 10 examines the outcomes of home education in relation to qualifications, further education and employment and discusses what these findings could mean for home education and the nature of education inquiry more broadly. Chapter 11 discusses the perception of EHE from the view point of home educators/educatees. It considers initial family views regarding the decision taken and broader societal views in terms of awareness and understanding. Lastly, Chapter 12 offers considerations or recommendations for change regarding EHE awareness, support and funding.

Chapter 13 draws together the findings of this study within the framework of the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. It reviews the results in the context of the literature review and discusses some of the wider implications of the research findings.

## Section one

Presenting the background to home education:  
Historical and legal context



## **2 Chapter 2: Origins of home education and its contemporary legal context**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the history of elective home education (EHE) and its legal position in the UK and abroad in order to provide context to the current EHE situation. This chapter comprises two sections. The first will examine the origins of EHE which will in turn provide information about the rationale and impetus that underpins the EHE movement internationally. The second section will explore the legal status (or lack thereof) of EHE within the US, Continental Europe (Germany and the Netherlands) and the UK. The reasons for focusing on these countries specifically are twofold: firstly, the research is situated within the UK so reference to the legal status of EHE is necessary, and secondly exploring the legal context of EHE in other countries will help to situate it within a broader theoretical framework.

### **2.2 History of home education**

In order to provide an overview of the origins of EHE, it is important to make reference to the following areas: the period prior to the 19th century, the introduction of mass universal education and the role of educational theorists. The areas specified are fundamental in aiding understanding about the background of EHE and why it underwent a period of stagnation prior to it gaining momentum in the latter stages of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

#### **2.2.1 Historical context**

It is only relatively recently (late 1970s onwards) that EHE has seen a resurgence in popularity, particularly in the United States of America (US) and UK. However, it is not a new phenomenon. This is because its existence transcends compulsory schooling as it has its roots in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and was often the only education children received (Knowles, 1988). For example, in the upper classes (both in the UK and abroad) most children were educated at home either by parents or

tutors because home education was deemed a central and effective way for families to direct their children's upbringing. Kellogg (1988) mentions that during this period,

the household was not only the locus of production; it was also the institution primarily responsible for the education of children, the transfer of craft skills, and the care of the elderly and infirm. (pxiv cited in Carper, 2000, p9)

The family unit was, therefore, fundamental to the economic, educational, political, social and religious function of society and this continued virtually unchanged until the early 1800s.

By the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, a variety of specialised institutions began to absorb traditional familial responsibility for educating. In England and Wales for example, local communities and churches felt that a more cohesive and systematic approach to education would be advantageous as schools could mirror the religious beliefs of their patrons and could assist parents in the education of the young. Schools were subsequently perceived by families as complementing, rather than replacing, parents' educational efforts; they were regarded as mere extensions of households (Carper, 2000). This was similarly reflected in the US and Continental Europe (see Knowles, 2000).

However, by the early to middle decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the home no longer exerted such a powerful influence upon education. In England and Wales the introduction of the Elementary Education Act (1870) outlined the framework for schooling of all children between the ages of 5 and 12. Subsequent acts followed (e.g. the 1876 Factory Act) which culminated in a further Education Act in 1880. It made school attendance compulsory between the ages of five and ten. The role of the state in education was similarly mirrored in other western countries. For example, all states in the US had passed compulsory attendance laws by 1918 (Carper, 1992).

### **2.2.2 Mass education**

The advent of mass education in western countries was a pivotal point because it indicated that governments were committed to taking control or ownership of

educational practices for the benefit of political, social and economic life. For example, there was a strong desire by western governments to counteract undesirable characteristics perceived in the lower classes and to remove the stamp of individual and ethnic orientations that immigrant family learning promoted (Knowles *et al*, 1992).

Thus, public schooling could be perceived in two ways: first as providing a more equitable system of education, due to it remedying the ills of the lower classes; or secondly as a means of control and action against some families (Reimer, 1971). According to Knowles *et al* (1992), the former view took precedence during this period which is why public schools were revered and held in high esteem by parents. However, in the intervening part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the perception of public schools began to change, particularly in the US, where instead of being viewed favourably, they were now subject to widespread criticism (see Goodman, 1962; Ravitch, 2010).

The next section focuses particularly on the growing disillusionment of public education in the US: it explains how and why the impetus of home schooling evolved, and the implications this had not only on the educational context in the US but worldwide.

### **2.2.3 Disillusionment with public education**

In particular, concerns in the US centred upon the pace and scale of growth of public education and the uniformity of the institutions. During this period public education had become a massive, nearly universal experience for Americans. This was evident by the growth in school enrolments and the widening of school districts to accommodate as many children as possible: from 117,000 districts in 1939 to 16,000 in 1980 (Gaither, 2009b). Such schools also tended to be very similar in terms of design, format and content due to it being a more cost-effective and accountable approach. Therefore, children were not only attending schools which were bigger and further away from their neighbourhoods due to the convergence of school districts, but also ones that discouraged differentiation and the pursuit of individual interests.

For conservative Christians the shift away from private interests to national interests was particularly pronounced and led to a widening political sensibility and increased involvement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. This was because they felt that the government was uninterested in Christian culture and values. The Supreme Court rulings of 1962 and 1963 which outlawed organised school prayer and school sponsored Bible reading in all state sponsored schools sparked fierce opposition. They were determined that their views would not be further marginalised which is why millions of Americans joined groups such as the John Birch Society and later the Moral Majority to fight against government initiatives which were not compatible with their own interests (Gaither, 2009b).

Furthermore, a host of alternative cultural institutions that condemned the cultural mainstream were spawned as a means of reaffirming their place in society. These included: Christian book stores; radio and television stations; rock concerts; theme parks; and summer camps. A parallel Christian culture was therefore emerging and this helped to project the view among conservative Christian families that they could take responsibility for their own family life, including the education of their children (Carper, 2000).

Similarly, many liberals were disillusioned with the pace of social change during this period and also began to see the benefits of taking ownership of family life. Although the approach advocated by the liberals differed to the conservatives, it was underpinned by the same premise: a 'do-it-yourself' attitude. For example, they started advocating the benefits of communal living and homesteading because they felt such an environment encouraged freedom of thought and expression and allowed people to organise themselves in ways they saw fit (Carper, 2000).

According to Gaither (2009b), the popularity of this approach was evident by the early 1970s: there were 2000 rural communities in existence and as many as 5000 less-organised 'collectives' ranging from urban villages to more informal 'crash pads' where anyone was welcome to stay. The growth and popularity of communal living and the self-sufficiency lifestyle it provided led many to question the need for state involvement as all the necessary resources for a happy and sustained life were at their

disposal. In particular, this rhetoric was evoked forcefully in regards to child rearing and education, with many families deciding to educate their children at home. They viewed schooling as a symbol of everything wrong and destructive in modern life and wanted to liberate their children, not subject them to subversion.

#### **2.2.4 Figureheads of the movement**

Home education also gained widespread appeal during the 1970s and 1980s through the work of John Holt (1964); Ivan Illich (1971) and Raymond Moore (1984) who became figureheads of the EHE movement.

John Holt was a notable advocate for the movement because he was quite successful at convincing the nation, especially the US media, that home schooling was a harmless and perhaps even noble phenomenon. Holt wrote the first national home schooling magazine *Growing without schooling* (debuted in August 1977) and appeared on numerous talk shows such as The Phil Donahue Show to publicise the publication and authored numerous books: *How children fail* (1964) and *How Children Learn* (1967).

In addition, Holt was at the forefront of calls to make home schooling legal in America. In the 1970s and 1980s only 36 of 50 states had either explicit or implied provision for home instruction: 15 mentioned home instruction in one way or another and 21 contained phrases like ‘equivalent instruction elsewhere’ or ‘instruction by a private tutor’. Furthermore, the states differed markedly over the specificity of their rules governing non-public school instruction and who was in charge of it all. Some empowered local school boards to govern such matters and some states established robust requirements, with six states requiring any teacher of children to be certified by the same standards used to certify public school teachers (Farenga, 1999). Thus, there was a great deal of divergence in state legal codes and policies and this is why Holt was vocal in his attempts to encourage the home schooling movement to advocate for legislative change. The impetus provided by Holt certainly helped home schooling because by the 1980s there was an increased political energy among home schooling parents at both a national and local level.

The next section outlines the legal challenges that were brought by homeschoolers in order to secure its future.

### **2.2.5 Changes in policy and legislation**

The *Massachusetts Perchemildes v. Frizzle case* (1979) is particularly notable as it marked a turning point in the legal status and public perception of home schooling in the US. It permitted home school parents to choose from a range of educational alternatives rather than restrict them to the curricula of public schools. This in turn led to other successful home schooling developments as parents sought to secure favourable state court decisions or legislation for home schooling. For example, in some states courts agreed that the state statutes were unconstitutionally vague and legislatures should compose new home schooling legislation. In others, home schools were given the same credibility and recognition as private schools. Finally, states with explicit requirements that were regarded as too onerous by homeschoolers were amended in the face of public opposition (Lyman, 1998).

Thus, the sheer determination and hard work of homeschoolers and their advocates subsequently paid off, as states began either introducing or clarifying home school legislation. By 1993 their efforts were fully rewarded when home schooling was legalised nationwide. However, this was not the only success of the movement because the constant campaigning to keep home schooling in the spotlight ultimately helped to confirm the place of home schooling in mainstream society and its consciousness, both in the US and abroad (Stevens, 2003).

The evidence for this can be found by examining the number of texts published on EHE during this period (1980s and 1990s), with the UK in particular following the lead of the US. One notable UK author is Dr Roland Meighan who has published extensively on this area (over 20 authored and edited books) and in a similar vein to US educational theorists has questioned the innate purpose and function of schools (see Meighan, 2004). Moreover, Meighan continues to write and discuss publicly his

opposition at the standards culture encompassing UK schools (see *Personalised Education Now Blog*).

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that the liberal approach adopted by the US government with regard to home schooling is rarely mirrored in other countries, with, arguably, the exception of the UK. The next section will examine the current legal, policy and registration procedures of home education in the US, Continental Europe (Germany and the Netherlands) and the UK (England and Wales).

## **2.3 Policy and law**

First, the legal context of home schooling in the US is made reference to because, as previously mentioned, it was at the forefront in implementing changes to legalise this provision. The other area for examination includes Continental Europe (Germany and the Netherlands) because EHE is either de-facto illegal or highly regulated which highlights that not every country holds liberal policies or procedures in regards to this provision. Lastly, the legal situation in England and Wales is explored because this is where my research is focused. It will also include an overview of a government-commissioned review into EHE in England (the Badman Review, 2009) which proposed changes that would have radically altered the home education context.

### **2.3.1 The US**

The US holds a liberal approach to home schooling with no national definitive policy or guidelines. This is in line with *Amendment One* outlined in the US Bill of Rights (1791):

Congress shall make no law ... prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

It is important to note that in spite of a lack of national legislation on home schooling US state policy about EHE does exist; however, it tends to be sporadic and diverse in nature, similar to LA EHE practices in England and Wales. Current regulations imposed by individual states to monitor and regulate home school curricula range from Indiana and Michigan's vague mandate for 'instruction equivalent to that given in public schools', which include no registration requirements. Whereas in Pennsylvania and New York, state law agencies oversee and regulate home schooling in a number of ways, from curricula requirements to parental qualifications, to mandatory home visits by certified personnel, to obligatory standardised testing (Kunzman, 2009).

Despite the arguably liberal attitude towards home schooling in the majority of states, this is not to say that US home schooling families have been exempt from attempted rulings which have tried to limit the rights and responsibilities of home schooling parents. Most recently, the state of California argued that all home tutors should be state certified (Lost Angeles Times, 2008). However, the court found in favour of home schooling families and came surprisingly close to finding a right to home school in the Federal Constitution (Yuracko, 2008).

In contrast, the legal situation for home education in European countries such as Germany and the Netherlands is not as favourable.

## **2.3.2 Continental Europe**

### **2.3.2.1 Germany**

In Germany home education is de-facto illegal under federal legislation because schooling is seen as mandatory and governed by the state. Article 7 and 1 of the Federal Constitution outlines this: 'The entire school system shall be under the supervision of the state' (Reimer, 2010). However, it is not only in federal legislation where compulsory schooling is regarded as the legal cornerstone of the state's mandate to educate; it is also evident in some state (or 'Lander') constitutions. Article 14 and 1 of the Constitution of the Land of Baden-Wurttemberg states, 'Schooling is



compulsory'. Moreover, the Constitution of the Land of Hessen, as outlined in Article 56, adopts a similar line of reasoning: 'Schooling is compulsory. The school system is the matter of the state'. This is also reinforced in the *Hessian School Act* in sections 56 and 2:

Compulsory schooling has to be complied with by attendance at a German school. Foreign children can comply with their duty in private schools approved as complementary schools which lead to an international baccalaureate or graduation of a member state of the European Union. Exceptions are decided upon by the School Authority. They need a compelling reason. (cited in Reimer, 2010, p9)

Therefore, in German federal or state law the mandate to educate is aligned with schooling and only in exceptional circumstances can this approach be contested. The exclusivity of the state in respect to education is further reinforced by the imposition of penalties for parents who contravene school laws to home educate. Parents can be punished with a fine of up to several thousand Euros. The local administration also has the option to use the support of the police to bring absent pupils back to school. Further, if parents wilfully and repeatedly keep their children away from school the court can partially or completely withdraw custody of a child from their parents (Spiegler, 2003).

The case of 15-year-old Melissa Busekros from Bavaria was particularly high profile and made headlines around the world. The German authorities in 2007 assumed custody of Melissa (the eldest of six children) in a police raid and placed her in a psychiatric hospital in Nuremberg. They found her to be suffering with 'school phobia' because she preferred to be educated at home (The Washington Times, 2007). At the time of Melissa's removal, her younger siblings (of school age) were attending school. In six additional states home education can be considered (regarding the case in question) as an indictable offence, with the maximum penalty being a six-month prison sentence (Spiegler, 2003).

Nevertheless, despite such sanctions there are some parents who are willing to contravene the law and face the consequences in order to educate their children at

home. This is evidenced by the number of children currently engaged in this provision, with conservative estimates suggesting that there are between 600 and 1000 children across the country being educated at home. Moreover, home education groups and forums, both national and local, are growing in prominence because they are not only trying to connect home educators but in some cases are fighting for legalisation of home education either through the courts, the media or by political lobbying (Blok and Karsten, 2011).

Spiegler (2009) makes reference to one of the most well-known national home education organisations in Germany: Schulunterricht zu Hause e.V' (SCHUZH). It was founded in 2000 precisely to offer legal counsel in issues related to home education and also aims to be a national voice for home educators. The organisation is open to all families who want support, although the board of SCHUZH and most of its members are Christian.

Despite the existence of home education in Germany and the growing prevalence of both local and national support groups, the government is still maintaining its legal position regarding home education. This is evident in numerous court cases where home educating families who have gone to court to challenge the ban, both nationally and locally, have lost (i.e. Leuffen v Germany 1992; Konrad v Freiburg, 2002 and Neubronner v Bremen, 2009).

Due to the threat of penalties and criminal prosecution in Germany, some families have decided to leave in favour of countries which support EHE. Two families have been granted political asylum in the US because of Germany's stance against EHE (The Guardian, 2010; BBC News, 2010) and similarly the UK is regarded as an attractive destination for German EHE families as outlined by a recent media article: *Home-School Germans flee to UK* (The Observer, 2008).

### **2.3.2.2 The Netherlands**

In the Netherlands, although home education is not de-facto illegal, in principle every child is subject to compulsory school attendance from their fifth birthday. The compulsory education law (Leerplichtwet) means that s/he must:

- a) be enrolled at a government approved school
- b) attend this school whenever it is open, barring certain circumstances, such as illness

However, although home education is not recognised by law in the Netherlands, the legality of home education is mostly based on article 5, clause b, of the Compulsory Education Law. It exempts parents from registering their child at school if they object to the orientation (*richting*) of the education given by all schools within a reasonable distance from their home (around 20 km). Court precedents have made clear that ‘*richting*’ stands for the religion or life philosophy on which the school has been founded. Exemptions, however, will not be granted in cases where during the previous year the child has attended a school with an orientation which the parents object to (outlined in Article 8 of the Compulsory Education Law). Thus, in most cases parents have to start court proceedings if they want to home educate their child if they have been registered at and attend a government approved school (Netherlands Home Education Association).

Parents in the Netherlands, therefore, have some recourse in law to exempt their child from schooling which is in contrast to the situation in Germany. In England and Wales, the law on EHE is arguably clearer but still remains a controversial issue, nonetheless.

### **2.3.2.3 England and Wales**

In England and Wales presently, the law on EHE is outlined in the Education Act of 1996 (previously Section 36 of the Education Act, 1944) which states that parents have a duty to ensure that their school-aged children receive ‘efficient full time education, suitable to his age, aptitude and ability, and to any special needs that he may have, either by regular attendance at school *or otherwise* [emphasis added]’. It is the final two words, ‘or otherwise’ that establishes the lawfulness of home education as it constructs a crucial distinction between education and school attendance, and ensures that only the former is compulsory (Monk, 2004). However, the right to educate is conditional on parents providing a ‘suitable’ and ‘efficient’ education.

The terms 'suitable' and 'efficient' are not defined in statute law but there are two examples of case law from England and Wales that can help with the interpretation of this:

*Harrison & Harrison v Stevenson*. Appeal 1981, Worcester Crown Court

The judge defined a 'suitable education' as one which was:

1. to prepare the children for life in modern civilised society, and
2. to enable them to achieve their full potential. (QB (DC) 729/81)

In the second case *R v Secretary of State for Education and Science, ex parte Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass School Trust*, 1985. Mr Justice Wolf said

education is 'suitable' if it primarily equips a child for life within the community of which he is a member, rather than the way of life in the country as a whole, as long as it does not foreclose the child's options in later years to adopt some other form of life if he wishes to do so. (The Times, 1985)

The guidance on what constitutes a 'suitable' and 'efficient' education can, therefore, be regarded as vague because not only are the definitions open to interpretation but also neither specially makes reference to 'efficient' education. Davies (2009) asserts that the definition of 'efficient' is generally regarded as 'one that achieves what it sets out to achieve'. It is unsurprising then given the lack of clarity on this issue that the onus falls on parents to ascertain what they think defines a 'suitable' and 'efficient' education and to conduct the provision accordingly. It is also further reinforced by the fact that Local Authorities (LAs) have no clear criteria and limited powers with regards to EHE.

For example, the *DCSF Guidelines on Elective Home Education* (2007) do not provide a definition of 'suitable' or 'efficient', but merely state that LAs have a duty to intervene if it appears that parents are not providing a 'suitable' or 'efficient' education for their child. Moreover, they have no legal requirement to see and monitor a home educated child because there is no mandatory obligation for parents

to register their child as home educated and thus have contact with their LA. This is despite the fact that LAs have professional duties governing education and safeguarding of EHE children in line with statutory legislation (Education Act, 2002; Children Act, 2004). Thus, given the law on home education in England and Wales and the lack of specific policy documents and guidelines prescribing how home education is directed or indeed monitored, the home education context can be perceived as a liberal one. However, in 2009 the Labour Government commissioned the Badman Review into home education which was the first comprehensive review of home education in England. The review was a source of contention both within and outside the EHE community, not only for the way it was conducted but also because it proposed recommendations that would change the EHE context quite considerably.

## **2.4 The Badman Review**

### **2.4.1 Aims of the Review**

The (proposed) aims of the Review were centred on providing a more detailed overview of EHE in England and Wales. This was prompted by the death of a seven-year-old girl (Kira Ishaq) in Birmingham (May 2008) who died from abuse and neglect inflicted by her mother and stepfather after having been withdrawn from school on the understanding that she was to be EHE (BBC News, 2010). Moreover, there was a consensus of opinion in both public and private sectors that there was a lack of awareness about the EHE community despite the UK mirroring the international growth and popularity of EHE (DCSF, 2007). In contrast, other notable EHE contexts such as the US have developed an extensive research culture around this area with research organisations founded primarily for this purpose (see National Home Education Research Institute).

Despite this Review being regarded as topical and timely by the Government, it was subject to intense scrutiny in both public (e.g. Ralph Lucas, House of Lords) and private arenas (Home Education groups) (The Guardian, 2010).

## 2.4.2 Conduct of the Review

First, the basis and subsequent conduct of the Review was seen to be unjust and insufficient for large-scale changes that would alter the EHE context quite considerably (e.g. registration of all home educating children: Recommendation 1). Criticisms centred on the Review being aligned with safeguarding concerns from the outset because EHE registration was not mandatory. One notable example was provided by the then Children's Minister, Baroness Morgan who stated that 'in some extreme cases, home education could be used as a cover for abuse, forced marriage, sexual exploitation or domestic servitude' (The Times, 2009).

The concern over safeguarding was also echoed in the Badman Review (2009, Paragraph 8.12):

.... on the basis of LA evidence and case studies presented, and even acknowledging the variation between authorities, the number of children known to children's social care in some LAs is disproportionately high relative to the size of their home educating population. (p13)

However, no figures were provided to support the claims made by Baroness Morgan or Graham Badman (Conroy, 2010). In addition, when EHE families accessed data about safeguarding in LAs through Freedom of Information Requests (see: <http://www.whatdotheyknow.com>) they found the claims made about safeguarding by Badman to be false. According to the EHE campaign group, the assertion was based on extrapolation from estimates provided by a potentially unrepresentative sample of 25 LAs. Further, the data included all EHE children 'known to social care' rather than solely relating to safeguarding concerns. They found this to be further indicative of data being misrepresented to support the registration recommendation.

The campaign group noted that EHE children may be known to social care for reasons other than safeguarding concerns (e.g. a neighbour who was unaware that EHE is legal). The fact that a government public consultation opened on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2009 for a period of four months (closed on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2009) to gather more 'extensive information' about the registration and safeguarding proposals (DCSF, 2010) only

served to compound the view among EHE groups that the first round of data collection was insufficient.

Further, the Review was conducted over a short time period (January–April 2009) which, according to opponents of the Review, impeded the extent to which a representative overview of EHE could be achieved: LAs were provided with 14 working days to turn round the questionnaire and the wider general public had 24 working days (House of Commons Report, 2009). The number of LAs and families who replied to a questionnaire survey (which formed part of the Review, alongside interviews) consisted of 90 LAs and 1300 EHE parents and children.

Increased conflict and tension surrounded both the commissioning and conduct of the Review because many home educators felt the Review was not needed, especially since there was no evidence to suggest that home educated children were more at risk of abuse compared to their schooled peers. Unsurprisingly, tensions in the EHE community towards the Review did not dissipate upon the publication of the 28 recommendations in June 2009.

### **2.4.3 Recommendations**

The most controversial recommendation (Recommendation 1) centred on the registration of all home educating families. On the 8<sup>th</sup> December 2009 the highest number of petitions ever presented on a single topic (against this proposal) was placed in the petitions bag behind the speaker's chair (BBC News, 2009). The topic in question concerned the government's proposal to introduce a *Children, Schools and Family Bill* (2009) which would amend the *Education Act*, (1996). The bill would make it mandatory for EHE children to be registered with their LA (Recommendation 1) and would provide more succinct guidelines for home educators due in part to defining the extent to which educational provision is deemed 'suitable' and 'efficient'. Nonetheless, although there was widespread condemnation within the EHE community regarding recommendations which focused on regulation or safeguarding concerns, not all of the recommendations were viewed unfavourably.

Recommendations that focused specifically on improved support and services, particularly those for SEN families and for young people who wanted to take formal exams (e.g. GCSEs), were met with widespread approval (see Recommendations 10 and 11), especially since EHE children do not get the funding that automatically follows a child in formal education. One notable adversary of the Badman Review, Fiona Nicholson, Chair of Education Otherwise (the largest UK EHE group; 5,000 members), spoke in support of the recommendations that removed ‘the barriers for access to services for EHE children and families’ (Radio 4 Woman’s Hour, 2010). However, this did not moderate Nicholson’s view of the Badman Review overall. She regarded it as damaging for the EHE community and society as a whole (Radio 4 Woman’s Hour, 2010) because the registration and inspection procedures would limit the rights of parents to choose and provide the educational provision they deemed to be appropriate.

However, to the relief of many home educators and their supporters the EHE components of the Bill along with those relating to sex education were dropped. This was due in part to Conservative Party opposition, parliament being dissolved in the run up to the general election (BBC News, 2010,) and because of the considerable furore evident in both private and public arenas. Thus, despite the Labour Government’s resolve to enforce registration and impose more stringent criteria in relation to monitoring, the home education context in England and Wales post-Badman has ultimately not changed because the proposals were not enshrined in legislation. However, this is not to say that the topic is closed completely. The Welsh Assembly recently made plans for a compulsory register for home educated children as part of the draft Education (Wales) Bill (2012). Again, this has sparked fierce opposition within the EHE community and an e-petition has been set up to gain signatures against such a proposal (National Assembly for Wales, 2012).

#### **2.4.4 Conclusion**

As outlined, the legal context of EHE is complex because legislation differs markedly between countries and even between states. Even so, despite the varying policies or defined protocols, what is apparent is that families are pursuing this provision



regardless of locality. However, as mentioned this model of education dates back to before compulsory schooling so it should not be seen as all that surprising that EHE is once again part of the educational trajectory for some children.

What is interesting though is the variety of reactions EHE provokes in various countries and/or states. This is evident by national or local intervention and involvement which includes Government commissioned reviews (the Badman Review); legal anomalies or state enforced penalties (Germany and the Netherlands); and attempts to impose rules and regulations on home schooling (e.g. California).

The next chapter aims to discuss some of these arguments further by focusing primarily on theoretical and philosophical perspectives concerning the nature of rights in education and the purpose of education and schooling.

## Section two

Key debates surrounding rights in education and the purpose of education and schooling

## **3 Chapter 3: Rights in education – who has the right to educate and what is it for?**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will examine theoretical and philosophical perspectives relating to rights in education and the purpose of the education and schooling because they undeniably impact the perception and value placed on home education by society at large. In short, the purpose of this chapter is to critique debates surrounding education and to uncover who ultimately is charged with governing this area – parents or the state? This may go some way in helping to explain the controversies and power struggles surrounding the legality of home education both past and present. The chapter is organised into two sections. First, the issue of rights in education will be discussed which will include the following: case law on home education and theoretical debates that underpin the discourse on rights in the contemporary context. The second section will explore the purpose of education and schooling and will provide a definition of education and key debates that surround this area. In particular it will make reference to how such perspectives impact upon home education.

### **3.2 Right to educate**

#### **3.2.1 Case law**

First, an example of case law relating to home education is provided (Leuffen v Germany, 1992) because it represents one of the most significant challenges to the claim that home education is a fundamental right (with the exception of Konrad v Germany, 2006). Moreover, it emphasises clearly the irreconcilable conflict between the rights claim of home educators and the conflicts about home education within a broader political context.

#### **3.2.2 Leuffen v Germany (1992)**

The case of Leuffen v Germany is particularly notable because Renate Leuffen attempted to overturn at the European Commission of Human Rights previous court

rulings (i.e. Dusseldorf District Court; Regional Court; Court of Appeal and the Federal Constitution Court) which refused her permission to home educate her son in accordance with her religious beliefs. The Commission rejected her central allegation that it was a violation of her rights under Article 2 of the First Protocol of the European Convention on Human Rights (1952) which states that ‘... the State shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions’ (Paris 20. III).

The Commission deemed her application inadmissible because the German authorities with the help of expert opinion believed that Leuffen was not able to ensure the education of her son. Thus, they held that a policy of compulsory schooling, which in effect outlaws home education, was lawful and did not violate the rights of parents (Leuffen vs. Germany, 1992).

This decision was based on previous decisions of the European Court of Human Rights which had established that the child’s right to education in the Article takes precedence over any parental right. In particular, it relied on the judgement in Campbell and Cosans v UK (1982) (a case relating to physical punishment) that the convictions of parents must not conflict with the fundamental right of the child to education; the whole of Article 2 of the first protocol being dominated by its first sentence.

This ruling was important because it further positioned a parent’s right to home educate as ‘conditional’ rather than an ‘absolute’ right. This line of reasoning reflects the domestic law of England and Wales, namely that the right to home educate is an aspect of parental responsibility and conditional on the provision of a ‘suitable’ education (Education Act, 1996).

However, given that in Germany home education is de-facto illegal some argue that even if the Commission had found in Leuffen’s favour she still would not have been entitled to home educate. This in turn serves to undermine the basis upon which the Commission’s decision was made as it was based primarily upon accepting the

finding of experts that Leuffen was incapable of educating her child, a finding that implicitly supports the right to monitor (see Spiegler, 2003; Monk, 2003). Further, the Commission also went on to hold that, ‘Article 2 of the First Protocol does not prevent the State from establishing compulsory schooling’. This statement is particularly significant because while the article is clear in establishing a right to education, it makes no reference to schooling. Thus, by the Commission upholding the law based in part on this premise it fails to distinguish the difference between ‘schooling’ and ‘education’ and this distinction is crucial in the case for home education. This is primarily because there is no explicit right to school life; however, there is an explicit right to education (Monk, 2003; Monk, 2004).

Nevertheless, despite the evident limitations of the Commission’s verdict the arguments debated in the Leuffen case are not new: the issue of ‘rights’ in regards to education has been widely contested and controversial for centuries and none more so than in the context of home education.

The next section summarises the ‘rights’ arguments further by making reference to parents, the state and children, as all three of these groups have a role or part to play in such arguments. Both supporting and counter arguments to the rights issue in relation to education are discussed because it offers an insight (albeit brief) into the debates that surround this area which are used either in support of or against this provision.

### **3.3 Supporting the rights of parents/guardians**

#### **3.3.1 John Locke**

John Locke’s (1632-1704) ideology and philosophy in respect of education are still being perpetuated today, particularly by home education campaigners. This is because Locke is often regarded as a staunch defender of parents’ rights in the realm of education.

Locke argued in favour of an education at home by parents or tutors selected by parents and talked about the education of children primarily as a right and duty of parents rather than of the state. Thus, Locke believed that parents should play the leading role in educating children for both pedagogical and political reasons (Locke, 1690).

Locke's pedagogical reasons for defending parents' rights in the realm of education centred upon his belief that parents or tutors offered a more nurturing and encouraging environment than schools. In Locke's opinion, schools were not able to tailor education to the specific needs of each child because learning was rote and formulaic whereas in the home, learning could be adapted to the child and integrated as part of play which in turn would lend itself to higher learning outcomes. Locke was convinced that children would learn far more if learning was part of play and not forced upon them (Ashcroft, 2002).

However, Locke was not only critical of schooling because it failed to take into account individual needs, but also because a child's virtuous character could be better developed at home under the supervision of a parent or tutor. To that end, it could be argued that Locke had a picture of the sort of adult he sought to produce.

Locke thought it highly likely that in schools a child would learn rudeness, dishonesty and a host of other vices from other children. In contrast, in the home parents or tutors could instruct and model virtue and manners in the child. This was regarded as important by Locke because the child's rational faculties for understanding property and in turn justice are not as advanced as adults'. These virtues included civility, humanity (abstaining from cruelty), generosity, gracefulness, honour, humility, industry, kindness, love of God, love of study, modesty, politeness, prudence, reverence, self-control, self-denial and self-restraint (Wootton, 2003).

In regards to Locke's political statements about the natural rights of individuals, Locke made it clear that the right, duty and power of educating children are with parents. The evidence for this can be found in a number of Locke's works, such as the *Second treatise of government* (1690) where Locke argued that parents are

by the Law of Nature, under an obligation to preserve, nourish and educate the children, they had begotten, not as their own Workmanship, but as the Workmanship of their own Maker, the Almighty, to whom they were to be accountable to them. (TT, 2.56)

This statement underlines Locke's philosophy because it highlights that the power parents have over children stems from the duties they have to care for them. Locke believed that since children are not able to act rationally they are to obey their parents until they are adults at which point they owe their parents only honour, not obedience. This is because Locke held that human beings 'are born free as we are born rational; not that we actually have the exercise of either: Age that brings one, brings with it the other too' (TT, 2.61, 1690). Therefore, Locke was of the opinion that it is parents, not governments who have the primary power and duty of educating children until the point at which they can care for themselves.

However, the pedagogical and political arguments advocated by Locke on education and the rights of parents should not be regarded as timeless or absolute. Instead they should be examined in the historical context in which they were written as this might predispose other interpretations (Tuckness, 2010). Firstly, Locke's opposition to schools could have stemmed from the historical context in which he was writing where the crucial choice would be to either have the child educated at home or to send the child to boarding school with minimal contact with his family. A public school system where children can conveniently attend school and still live at home under the supervision of their parents might have prompted a different response from Locke. This was also the view shared by Tarcov (1984) who mentioned that Locke admitted that both home and school education had inconveniences.

Secondly, Locke's political argument for defining education as a duty of parents rather than the state is also open to interpretation. In an analysis of Locke's writings on toleration, a *Letter concerning toleration*, different entities (a government, a family, a church, a business) exist for different reasons or in pursuit of different goals, although they may legitimately make claims to regulate the same activity (Wootton, 2003). In such cases Locke would allow the government to enforce its view in the face of opposition so long as it does so in pursuit of a legitimate government goal.

One example being where many animals have died from disease and the government bans the slaughtering of animals for a time so the numbers could be replenished.

Locke argued that such a law is legitimate, even though it restricts the liberty and freedom of religious groups who want to practise animal sacrifice. This is because the government is acting for civic, not spiritual ends which implies that the state could intervene or act in ways that restrict the rights of certain groups as long as the policy could be justified as necessary to keep the lives, liberties and properties of the citizens safe. When applied to the context of education, therefore, the state could be justified in providing or regulating education, even if it conflicts with the wishes of parents if there was a legitimate civil interest at stake.

Thus, Locke's pedagogical and political reasoning in respect of education are open to interpretation. For some theorists this is welcome due to disputing the view held by Locke that parents or guardians have a fundamental right to educate children which in turn undermines the basis for home education.

### **3.4 Opposing the rights of parents/guardians**

Dwyer (1994) is one theorist (authored numerous books/articles on this issue) who disagrees in principle that parents have a right to educate because it places the educator rather than the child at the centre of concern. Consequently, to justify the right to educate is to justify intervention in the child's life that would influence abilities, preferences and life prospects; the range of options open to him/her; and the choices s/he is likely to make. This level of interference would be considered quite unacceptable if the objects of such intrusion were adults but in society it is assumed that adult intervention is necessary to protect a child's interests.

The right to educate can, therefore, be seen as not just or fair because adults are always at the centre of the process irrespective of their ideology or value system. Given this, Tamir (1990) contends that the right to educate cannot be justified as a core right (e.g. the right to freedom of expression, right to personal liberty) from the



point of view of two dominant (and different) conceptions of rights: the 'interest theory' and the 'choice theory'.

According to the 'interest theory' of rights, a function of a right is to further the right-holder's interest. In the case of parents wanting to educate their children, although their own interests may be well-meaning and focused on the child, the very definition of this theory implies a violation of the autonomy of others. This is because while parents could justify their claim to a right to educate by asserting that they have a strong interest in assuring that their children will live a 'good life', it does not take into consideration the child's interests in regards to education or how they want to live their life.

In addition, the 'choice theory' of rights also creates conflict regarding a 'right to educate' because it assumes that the role of a right is to secure a realm of choice in which individuals are free to act without external intervention (Tamir, 1990).

Moreover, a right holder, according to Hart,

(1) has the right to forbearance on the part of all others from the use of coercion or restraint and (2) is at liberty to do (i.e. is under no obligation to abstain from) any action which is not one coercing or restraining or designed to injure other persons. (1984, p78)

The aim of choice theory is, therefore, to secure individuals not merely the largest possible range of free actions, but the ability to enjoy those freedoms constitutive of their ability to live autonomous lives. This implies that interference with another's freedom is unacceptable unless the interference is in order to ensure the same realm of choice for everyone since 'all men have an equal right to equal freedom' (Hart, 1984, p89).

The right to educate according to Hart (1984) stands in direct opposition to this principle because in educating their children, parents may secure for themselves a freedom (to choose their way of life) that they deny their children in childhood as well as maturity. This is because the parents' realm of choice is arguably wider than that of their children. Therefore, home education can ironically be seen as inhibiting the

exercise of choice because the ‘right to educate’ is invoked by adults, and thus their own cultures, values and interests take precedence over those whose interests they seek to conserve, protect and facilitate.

The evidence for this can be found by examining many religious groups and communities (e.g. the Amish or Orthodox Jews) where there is a pronounced disparity between the child’s right to be educated and the rights claimed by parents or the broader community (Lubenski, 2003). For example, in the case of *Wisconsin vs. Yoder* (1972) in the US the Amish community was granted the right to educate its children in accordance with the community’s beliefs and way of life (Peters, 2003). Thus, the religious and cultural ethos of the community was arguably valued above the individual needs or interests of a child. However, although the court found in favour of the Amish in the case of *Wisconsin vs. Yoder* (1972) it also outlined the rights and responsibilities of the state.

### **3.5 Supporting the rights of the state**

In the case of *Wisconsin vs. Yoder* (1972) the court held, ‘there is no doubt as to the power of the State, having a high responsibility for education of its citizens, to impose reasonable regulations for the control and duration of basic education’ (*Wisconsin v Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205, 1972).

This also echoes an earlier case in the US: *Pierce v Society of Sisters* (1925) which, although guaranteed parents the right to opt out of public schools, outlined the state’s vested interest in the education of children:

No question is raised concerning the power of the state reasonably to regulate all schools, to inspect, supervise, and examine them, their teachers and pupils....that teachers should be of good moral character and patriotic disposition, that certain studies plainly essential to good citizenship must be taught, and that nothing be taught which is manifestly inimical to the public welfare. (*Pierce v Society of Sisters*, 1925, 268 U.S. 510)

Therefore, the rights of parents to educate are also balanced for the most part against the rights of the state; however this has its own limitations, as the next section summarises.

### **3.6 Opposing the rights of the state**

The state, according to some theorists (Adams *et al*, 1989; Skillen, 1998; Conroy, 2010), is projecting its own goals by attempting to secure a range of social, cultural and economic outcomes through education. This is in evidence in the UK for example, by the introduction of the National Curriculum in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (1989, following the Education Reform Act, 1988) which outlined precisely what subjects had to be covered in state schools and set targets for future progress. Moreover, in the UK the state is increasingly compensating for and offering resolutions to a wide range of putative social problems or emergencies such as child abuse, drug addiction, childhood obesity and sexually transmitted diseases which are outlined in policies such as *Every Child Matters* (2003) or area-based initiatives such as *Sure Start* (launched in 1968 with the goal of reducing child poverty).

In addition to schools dealing with safeguarding anxieties and social problems they are also required to cultivate citizenship in schools. Since 2002, 'Citizenship' is a compulsory subject for children aged from 11 to 16 in England and it is also incorporated in compulsory Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons for children aged from 4 to 11 (Ofsted, 2003).

Similarly, in other developed western countries such as the US, individual states are also required by state legislature to oversee the curriculum, educational standards and standardised testing (Apple, 2000). Moreover, policies have been introduced both nationally and locally to try to counter educational disadvantage and target social problems. For example, *No Child Left Behind* (2002) was a federal policy aimed at improving educational standards for 'all' students because it required states to administer a standardised test annually, hold schools accountable for student achievement gaps and work to improve the quality of teaching.

Interventions in social problems also include reading recovery schemes which have been offered nationwide since 1965 by the Head Start programme (US Department of Health and Human Services). More recently Michelle Obama (2011) outlined plans for a childhood obesity plan that would mobilise the combined forces of the federal government to work with cities, foundations, businesses and non-profits because of its financial impact on the economy. Michelle Obama remarked,

... make no mistake about it: When we talk about childhood obesity, we're talking about the workforce that you're trying to build ... addressing the epidemic of childhood obesity has an impact on the bottom line. (The Washington Post, 2011)

Thus, the capacities and choices of parents are regarded by some observers as being marginalised or side-lined by successive governments in their attempts to secure the collective educational well-being of its citizens and to offer protection to its most vulnerable members through numerous policy initiatives and directives (Conroy, 2010).

However, as mentioned previously the role of the state in education is not new because it is a practice that transcends history starting with the introduction of state education itself. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Edmond Holmes (Chief Inspector of Elementary Schools, 1905) wrote a book entitled: *What Is and What Might Be* (1911) which offered a searing analysis of the failings of the school system in which teachers spoon-feed their pupils and where there is little room for genuine learning. Holmes resigned from his post because of his colleague's lack of understanding of the classroom experience and this is outlined succinctly below:

Why is the teacher so ready to do everything (or nearly everything) for the children whom he professes to educate? One obvious answer to this question is that for a third of a century (1862-1895) the 'Education Department' did everything (or nearly everything) for him. For a third of a century 'My Lords' required their inspectors to examine every child in every elementary school in England on a syllabus which was binding on all schools alike. In doing this, they put a bit into the mouth of the teacher and drove him, at their pleasure, in this direction and that. And what they did to him they compelled him to do to the child. (Holmes 1911, p7)

The salient features of the education system that were emphasised and condemned by Holmes are important to understand and acknowledge. Not only because they highlight the limitations of a centralised curriculum enforced through testing and inspection, but because the issues are as pertinent today as they were a century ago. This is evident by reports published in the UK and abroad which have criticised the dominance of the state in education, particularly with regards to the standards agenda encompassing schools (*The Plowden Report* (CACE, 1967); O'Donnell *et al* 2007).

The *Cambridge Primary Review of Education* (2010) is particularly noteworthy because it is the first review for 40 years to investigate and examine the condition and future of English primary education. The report concluded that primary schools have become too focused on the 'three 'Rs' (maths, English and science) and the curriculum needs to be broadened to include 12 aims for each pupil: well-being; engagement; empowerment; autonomy; respect and reciprocity; interdependence; citizenship; celebrating culture; exploring; fostering skills; exciting imagination; and enacting dialogue. In addition, the report also stated that children's learning should also cover eight domains including arts and creativity; language, oracy and literacy; and science and technology and this would replace the current narrower subject areas. Schools should also be given back part of the timetable reserved for teachers to design their own lessons locally. Thus, the findings argued for a more personalised approach to education because of its far reaching benefits for children's learning and teachers' professional identities (Alexander, 2009). Given that both the rights of parents and the state in education have evident limitations, Reich (2008) instead argues for a different approach that includes the interests of parents, the state and also the interests of the child in education.

### **3.7 'Triad of interests': Parents, children and the state**

Reich (2008) observes that

... children are not the property of their parents or of the state, because they possess human dignity as independent beings, they ought not to be educated so as to be made servile to their caretakers. Neither parents nor the state can justifiably attempt to imprint indelibly upon a child a set of values and beliefs,

as if the child must always defer and be obedient. To do so would render the child servile. (p22)

Reich (2008, 2002) is of the opinion that neither parents nor the state ought to be permitted to exercise sole authority over the education of children if a stable democratic society is to be achieved. In the context of home education, therefore, regulation of home education is important and justifiable as it serves the interests of the state, but also accommodates the interests of children and parents.

Glanzer (2008), however, on critiquing Reich's book *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in America* (2002), disagrees with the stance taken by Reich. This is because for Glanzer (2008) the state should only intervene in education (provided by parents) when it can demonstrate that a child is being educationally abused or neglected, just as the state can only intervene in parenting when it can demonstrate that the child is being abused or neglected. For example: 'If I claim my neighbour is abusing his or her child, I must show proof. If I claim my neighbour is educationally depriving his or her children, I should also bring proof' (p7). Thus, the legal framework used in child welfare policy should be applied to home schooling: the burden of proof is on the state to demonstrate that parents have harmed their child.

### **3.7.1 Summary**

The above arguments (while brief) demonstrate the differing opinions around rights and responsibilities in regards to education. As highlighted, there is no clear consensus about which should take precedence. Consequently, these arguments will continue to be debated by home educators and politicians alike at both a local and national level either in support of or against home education and its regulation.

The subject of rights and responsibilities in education also lends itself to another pertinent issue that is widely discussed and debated in relation to home education: the purpose of education and schooling. The next section will summarise the key arguments that surround this topic because such debates ultimately help to shape society's view about the purpose and value of education, either at home or in school.

First, the purpose education serves will be discussed because it highlights the difficulties in defining the term and its subsequent outcomes.

## **3.8 Key debates: The purpose of education and schooling**

### **3.8.1 Definition of education**

Pring (2008) asserts that it is highly probable that no such term has been as highly contested with regard to its meaning than the word ‘education’ because both a descriptive and evaluative meaning can be derived from it. The descriptive meaning is concerned with categorising education as a package of learning in order that a certain value is placed upon the education in question, e.g. a ‘grammar school education’ or ‘the education of diplomats’ (Pring, 2008, p10). In the evaluative sense, education is attributed to those activities and attainments that are judged to lead to an improvement of the person in terms of knowledge acquired, understanding achieved, skills mastered and values developed.

Both meanings are important to understand because in many respects the descriptive meaning of education is invariably related to the evaluative meaning; for example, in conversation people can talk approvingly of an ‘educated person’ or in contrast describe education as ‘indoctrination’ or mere ‘training’. It is in such discussions that the fundamental debates about education arise because people understandably differ in their views about what learning is valuable, how it should be prescribed and by who (see Holt, 1977; Biesta, 1994; Apple, 2000).

For some, ‘intellectual intelligence’ is regarded as the very definition of what constitutes an ‘educated person’ (Pring, 2008) and the formal environment of a school is perceived as the best place to cultivate such intellect. This is highlighted further in the section below:

### **3.8.2 Education: Knowledge acquisition**

Cardinal John Henry Newman (1952) was a strong advocate of the view that education lies in the mastery of distinctive forms of knowledge and experience. For

Newman, schools were regarded as essential in helping to initiate such forms of knowledge through subjects that would allow individuals to think more effectively about the physical and social worlds they inhabit.

More recently, O'Hear (1987) has argued that education is essentially authoritarian and paternalistic because its purpose is to aid the transmission of knowledge: 'Education is ... imparting to a pupil something which he has yet to acquire ... The transmission is ... inevitably between un-equals' (O'Hear, 1987, p5).

For O'Hear (1987), education must take place against the background of inherited thought and experience and be directed by suitably qualified educators:

Through education we should *enter into* those human achievements that have endured and which have, through cultural forms, provided some distancing of the individual from his own greed and need and from the need and greed of others. The hope of the true educator is that his pupils can resist the lure of the current fashions and ephemera, both in politics and in the market place, and also see their lure for what it is. (p105)

However, a strong opponent of the view that education is resolutely about intellectual intelligence is John Dewey who famously proposed that education is about nurturing the whole person, of which intellect is just one part.

### **3.8.3 Education: Nurturing interests**

Dewey was concerned with 'educating interests' which lies in introducing the young person to a form of life that recognises the social and moral nature of the person and their connection with the community (or indeed, several communities) of which they are physically and culturally a part:

... the ability to learn from experience; the power to retain from ones experience something which is of avail in coping with the difficulties of a later situation. This means power to modify actions on the basis of the results of prior experiences, the power to develop dispositions. (Dewey, 1916, p44)



Thus, Dewey believed that to exclude individual experiences and diverse cultures from the school system was innately wrong because for Dewey 'education' concerned the 'more intelligent management of life'; a life that was already being lived, shaped by experience and connected with family and community. It was these experiences that according to Dewey needed to be made sense of by the young people themselves if they were to obtain greater insight into the world they were to live and work within.

Nevertheless, although Dewey proposed a different type of education that connected learning with life, rather than treating learners as passive recipients of knowledge, he did not disagree with schooling; for Dewey schools were necessary to help young people grow in understanding of everyday matters that affect them. The following quote emphasises this view:

The purpose of school education is to insure the continuance of education by organising the powers that insure growth. The inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling. (Dewey, 1916, p49)

Dewey advocated an educational structure that balanced both the interests and experiences of students and the transmission of knowledge. However, although Dewey's educational theories were influential, they were not without critics. One of the most notable was Ivan Illich who disagreed that real life can be transferred into the school without altering the context of real life. Instead, Illich argued that children should be placed directly back into the world to learn so that individual interests can be developed, pursued and realised without the restrictions that schooling imposes.

### **3.8.4 Education: Individual pursuit**

Illich's ideas concerning education and schooling were outlined comprehensively in the book *Deschooling Society* (1971) which gained considerable attention after its publication. It provided a critical discourse on education as practised in modern economies and suggested that schools are not the only way of organising the resources required for learning. Moreover, it provided a clear distinction between the concept of 'schooling' and 'education'.

For Illich, 'schooling' was a compulsory, age-specific institutional process carried out by and in schools for the good of society (or more accurately, the good of the elite in society). It included such functions as custodial care; sorting and tracking; indoctrination and socialisation; and, to a limited extent, education; whereas, the concept of 'education' referred to an individual process that is tied up with rather vague notions of the voluntary acquisition by the individual of the common 'moral, cultural and aesthetic values', which together constitute our social capital. Thus, the definitions Illich applied to schooling and education projected the view that schooling (school systems) was detrimental because it restricted individual knowledge processes and basic (individual) pluralistic values in favour of centralising initiative and authority (see Reagan, 1980).

To that end, the educational processes that were favoured by Illich centred on a system of convivial educational 'webs' or channels of access to educational resources that would prepare individuals to learn freely and fully rather than manipulating individuals. These would consist of: (1) reference services to educational material; (2) skill exchange for those wishing to acquire or improve upon a skill; (3) peer matching, in which voluntary associations of people can organise themselves to pursue a common interest; (4) reference services to 'educators at large' in which professional educators would be employed to consult with and guide anyone interested in a certain topic (Illich, 1971).

However, although the aims and objectives of the learning webs were extensive, and on face value appeared to offer an alternative education system for some critics, they posed the same sort of dilemmas that Illich was trying to avoid. One of the main criticisms centred on the fact that all systems, however formed, develop rigidities and routines as well as hierarchies and connections with other institutions (see Postman, 1972; Summer, 1972; Lichtenstein, 1985). This was substantiated further by King (1972) who held that Illich's educational webs had limitations because they too can be ruined by poor practice, a shortage of practitioners or be open to exploitation.

Further, concern was voiced about limiting the role of the state in education through developing educational webs and giving greater ownership to individuals. In this

context the sole purpose of education can become more about pleasing and satisfying the preferences of the ‘consumer’ rather than about promoting the moral and civic values necessary for democratic citizenship. The evidence for this can be found in current policy discourse around school choice, for example where education as both a public and private good is seen to be replaced by an essentially privatised one as parents compete for school places in the most desirable catchment areas (see Greer, 1971; Gorard, 1997; Gorard *et al* 2003). Arguably, because it is more often than not wealthy parents who can exercise such choice, it serves to limit attempts to equalise educational provision for all children regardless of social or economic circumstance (Tooley, 1997). It is this argument (the trend for consumer choice in education) that is specifically made reference to and debated in the context of home education.

### **3.9 Criticisms of home education:**

#### **3.9.1 Privatisation of education**

One notable critic of home education is Apple (2000) precisely because of concerns that this model of education allows individual ideologies and convictions to develop and take precedence over public interests. Apple (2000) argues that there are many critical questions regarding the dangers associated with home education, and although it is quite probable that some specific children and families gain from home education, the larger concern is that home education will facilitate an extensive restructuring of society. This is because although advocates of home education argue that it helps to eliminate inequalities (i.e. social and economic) the very nature of the movement, which is described as ‘conservative modernization’ (Dale, 1989), is viewed by some critics as eroding institutional authority and power in favour of individualised ideologies and convictions (Whitty *et al* 1998). It is important to mention, however, that this argument is specifically directed at the US home schooling context given the popularity of this provision and its reported growth.

There are three major elements within the strand of ‘conservative modernization’, and the first one, according to Apple (2000), is represented by ‘neo-liberals’ who represent dominant economic and political elites who are intent on modernising the

economy and the institutions connected to it. They believe private is necessarily good and public is necessarily bad, and so they strongly support vouchers and privatised choice plans despite the fact that there is much empirical evidence to suggest that very real inequalities are created by such educational policies (see Launder and Hughes, 1999).

The second group consists of 'neo-conservatives' who want a return to high standards, discipline and 'real' knowledge. The third group is made up of largely white working class and middle class groups who mistrust the state. They are concerned with security, the family, gender and age relations within the home and traditional and fundamentalist religious views and knowledge (Apple, 2000).

Although all three groups are different, they are in the main concerned with individualism and their own pursuit of freedom and choice, which can arguably have a negative impact on society at large. This is because parents who have chosen to place their children in privatised, marketised and home schools more often than not do not want to pay taxes to support the schooling of the 'other'. The result of this is a declining tax base for schools; social services; health care; housing and anything 'public' for populations, which are usually situated in the most economically depressed urban and rural areas (Stevens, 2003a).

However, although many home educators do not want to fund those in the public sphere, they are more than willing to exploit public funding for their own gains. Religious home educating groups, such as the Home School League Defence Association (HSLDA, founded in 1983 in the US), are a case in point. This is primarily because they have considerable gravitas due to their membership (60,000 in 1999) and number of full-time employees (over 38 in 1999) (Gaither, 2009a). The considerable resources that the HSLDA have at their disposal are, according to some critics, directed at manipulating loopholes that are only available to certain groups and to gain recognition, whether financial or otherwise (Rozell, 2001). This in turn can have a decidedly negative effect in other spheres such as the politics of redistribution. Similarly Reich (2000) argues that the individualised nature of home education, although part of its appeal, is also part of its problem. This is not only

because of concerns around consumerism, class reproduction and human capital requirements, but also because of its impact upon citizenship.

### **3.9.2 Citizenship**

Reich (2002) asserts that no other education arrangement provides parents with the opportunity to tailor an education for their children and to instil beliefs and values they perceive to be important. Thus, parents are responsible not only for selecting what their children will learn, but when, how and with whom they will learn, which in turn arguably compromises and undermines the very notion of citizenship.

According to Reich (2002) part of able citizenship is about encountering beliefs and convictions, religious and otherwise, that conflict with one's own and being able to exercise such beliefs and ideals freely. To be a citizen also involves shared experiences and common values, and schooling is one of the few remaining social institutions in which people from all walks of life have a common interest and where children might come to learn the following common values: decency, civility and respect. It is also important for ensuring the continuity of a stable and civilised society.

Moreover, legal scholar Sunstein (2001) argues that a heterogeneous society without some shared experiences has a difficult time addressing common problems, and risks social fragmentation. Therefore, although home education may produce satisfied parents as consumers, and even offer excellent academic training to the student, it does not cultivate democratic citizenship in the same vein as schools. Reich (2002) asserts that although this may be a largely forgotten aim of education, it is important to redress this because otherwise a 'new consumer mentality will become the driving metaphor for the education of children' (p59).

The views advocated by the above authors in respect to home education are, however, not shared by all, with some theorists undermining the claims on which such arguments are based. The counterarguments, as summarised below, centre on concerns surrounding the privatisation of education and citizenship.

### **3.10 Counterarguments:**

#### **3.10.1 Privatisation of education**

The notion that home education is part of a broader anti-democratic movement that threatens the viability of the public school system and its attempts to provide equal opportunity is staunchly contested both within and outside of the home schooling community (see Aurini and Davies, 2005; Cloud and Morse, 2001; Lines, 2000). Theorists argue that while this theory is useful for understanding the arguments against the continued expansion of private schools, it has limitations when explained in the context of home education.

First, that parents increasingly assess educational options through a market lens for extrinsic rewards is, according to Aurini and Davies (2005), difficult to justify when referring to home education because it houses an assortment of actors including: religionists, Afrocentrists and alternative pedagogues who lack obvious consumerist orientations to education (motives for home education will be explored in detail in Chapter 4).

Moreover, few parents pursue home education to attain advantage in status competitions, preferring largely to give their child a tailored educational experience, or maintain the integrity of their family unit. Indeed, many families embrace home education in reaction to recent reforms that can be characterised as neo-liberal, such as incentives for standardised tests, tougher standards, league tables and other rating and accountability schemes. Therefore, although home education is growing in a neo-liberal context which promotes choice and emphasises market logic it is arguably misleading to suggest that home education must embody a neo-liberal ethos, when it is only loosely coupled to this educational trend through its association with choice and enhanced legitimacy (Aurini and Davies, 2005).

Similarly, linking home schooling with class reproduction and human capital is also viewed as contentious because home education, unlike private schooling, is seldom orientated towards these goals. In theory, private schools offer access to high powered

social networks, inculcate a prestigious sense of cultural capital and prepare students to excel in academic competitions. In contrast home educators lack networks of famous alumni, recognised social cache, established track records of academic achievement or a clear competitive advantage (see Maxwell and Maxwell, 1995).

Therefore, if a professional middle class family wants to ensure that its offspring later become middle class professionals home schooling is a less than optimal strategy because it cannot conclusively offer parents advantages for class reproduction or human capital acquisition (Davies, 2004). Moreover, one of the main limitations cited by home educating parents is the financial cost of teaching their children at home due to the enormous amount of parental time and effort that has to be provided (Rothermel, 2003). This serves to further undermine the argument that home educators are interested in class position or are driven by economic gain.

Aurini and Davies (2005) among others argue that home education represents a ‘choice without markets’. This is because unlike other private alternatives, it is animated less by logics of market calculation, class reproduction or human capital than by the expressive motives of home educators who endorse the culture of intensive parenting with its focus on the unique needs of the child. This was emphasised explicitly by one of the parents interviewed in their study: ‘Private school is just because you want to be elitist. Home schoolers generally want their kids around all the time. If my kids aren’t near me, I’m like really empty’ (p470).

Another main argument that is contested in the sphere of home education relates to the citizenship debate: some theorists do not support the notion that home education restricts or limits opportunities for civic engagement.

### **3.11 Counterarguments:**

#### **3.11.1 Citizenship**

Supporters of home education contest the view that citizenship education has to be promoted solely in schools as parents generally have a clear understanding of

citizenship and its importance, and this is encouraged and facilitated in home educating families.

Mayberry and Knowles (1989) for example, emphasised that the role of the family in home education helps to promote many of the aims associated with citizenship, such as confidence, autonomy, independence and curiosity. In contrast, citizenship education in schools places emphasis on history, geography and social studies lessons, and this limits the time available for participation in extracurricular activities, both inside and outside of school. Further, school councils, whose role is actually aimed at education for democratic citizenship, are limited in schools because they have very little say over the core purpose of schooling – curriculum and teaching, and learning methods (Harber, 2009).

In addition, Arai (1999) confounds the view that in order to be a good citizen you have to attend school, because both home and school approaches can foster this, albeit differently. For the most part, home educating families advocate a notion of multidimensional citizenship, which centres on the family but also incorporates participation in the public sphere. In schools, the basic facts of national history and governance are taught for the purpose of fostering informed participation in democracy and acquiring skills to explore the social world. Arai (1999) contends that both approaches are beneficial because there is no one valid interpretation for fostering citizenship. It is a constant process and people's ideas about good citizenship can change.

### **3.11.2 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined key debates surrounding rights and responsibilities in education and its fundamental purpose. As mentioned, these issues have been debated for centuries, with theorists such as John Dewey and John Locke been notable figureheads. Given the importance of such debates in educational discourse, and also its relevance to home education, it was felt necessary to discuss such issues in this thesis. After all, the purpose of education and the rights issue provoke fierce debate in both public and private arenas, either in support of or against home education. This is



evident in case law; for example *Leuffen vs. Germany* (1992), where parents have fought to educate their children at home or in government-commissioned reviews into home education where the responsibilities and interest of the state have been summarised (see the *Badman Review*, 2009).

Thus, fundamental questions relating to the purpose of education and who has the power to govern or dispense such rights are arguably as pertinent today as they were centuries prior, and perhaps even more so. This is because such issues raise important questions about the nature of education as both a public and private good and the extent to which this is accommodated in an ever-changing educational market place.

The emphasis on choice in education, for example, has become particularly pronounced over the last three decades and is likely to continue apace fuelled by advancements in technology (virtual schools are becoming increasingly popular). It is more than likely that such arguments will continue to dominate educational discussions both presently and in the future. However, whether more questions are posed than answered remains to be seen as certainly in the context of home education there are still ‘grey areas’ concerning who has the right to educate and by what definition this is practised. It will certainly be interesting, therefore, to watch the developments for the proposed registration system for home educators in Wales and to assess what impact (if any) this may have on the practice and provision of EHE more widely.

The next chapter will make reference to literature on home education that will examine the following: numbers and characteristics; motivations for home education; and outcomes. These areas will provide more detail about what is known about home education and home educators and will also help to explain why home education has prompted attention and debate both nationally and internationally. After all, it is only relatively recently that home education has become a topic of particular interest in both popular and academic circles because of its broadening appeal and growth in popularity.

## Section three

What do we know about the home educating population?

# **4 Chapter 4: Literature on home education**

## **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the literature on home education in order to provide an overview of what is currently known about the home educating population both in the UK and abroad. The chapter discusses the following four areas: numbers and characteristics; motives for home education; methods of educating children at home; and outcomes. These four areas are addressed because they will highlight and provide detail about the scale and diversity of the population; why parents decide to choose this provision; how home education is practised; and the outcomes for those involved (children and parents).

However, it is important to mention that the literature used to provide such a context will include a wide range of academic and media sources because empirical research on EHE is limited in the UK and Continental Europe, as opposed to the US. Only in 2003, according to the UK peer-reviewed *Evaluation and Research in Education Journal*, was a chapter solely designated to EHE (Editorial, 2003, p3). Media articles also offer a wide range of interested parties (i.e. home educators, academics, government officials) the means to express their views, and are also at the forefront of reporting or investigating areas of interest relating to EHE policy and practice.

## **4.2 Numbers and characteristics**

The number and characteristics of home educating students and their families in the UK are not comprehensive, which echoes data on home education worldwide. In the UK for example, a national registration scheme of home educating young people is not in existence and only certain states in the US account for home educators.

Nevertheless, despite information on home educators and their families being limited, this section will specifically outline the research available in the UK and US. This is because both countries are arguably at the forefront of the home education movement and thus any trends or developments are necessary to acknowledge as they may impact the movement more broadly.

In both countries attempts have been made to try to ascertain the numbers and characteristics of the EHE population through LAs'/states', home school support networks and household surveys. The research provided below offers an overview of some of the most pertinent examples.

#### **4.2.1 UK**

Fortune-Wood's (2005) study into home education over a two-year period (September 2002 to January 2004) is one of the most comprehensive to date. It reveals that EHE figures are somewhere in the region of 40-85,000. This figure was based on extrapolation of data provided by 263 EHE questionnaires combined with data from the Office for the National Statistics. However, although this data serves to indicate that EHE students are a visible part of society the data has to be treated with caution due to the small numbers elicited.

Nevertheless, given that other studies, such as the DCSF feasibility study into EHE (nine LAs sampled, 2007) and the Badman Review (90 LAs sampled, 2009), have also cited similar numbers (again samples are small) it does seem to suggest that EHE is a popular choice for parents. Moreover, a recent BBC (2011) news report suggests that home education is not only gaining in popularity but is also growing year on year. For example:

The number of parents in Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Swindon giving up on state education and teaching their children themselves is increasing. Five years ago local authority records showed just over 400 children were being educated at home in those areas. It now stands at more than 640 – a rise of more than 50%.

This apparent growth should be treated with some caution. As mentioned previously in relation to the home educating population projections, home educators are not required by law to register with their LA unless the child has been withdrawn from school. Thus, the increase in numbers could be attributed to home educating parents deciding to register with their LAs months or years later (although unlikely).

Alternatively, it could be a result of more meticulous record keeping by LAs post-Badman.

The data on characteristics of the home educating population should also be approached tentatively given that research is limited and thus open to interpretation. The research conducted, however, does seem to echo the popularity of EHE because it indicates that home education is not solely confined to a particular geographic location, family type, professional background or ethnic group.

For example, Fortune-Wood's (2005) research indicated that home educators live in a wide variety of neighbourhoods with 122 (49%) describing themselves as urban dwellers; 20 (8%) living in suburban areas; 41 (16%) living in semi-rural or small town settings; and 64 (25%) living in rural areas. In addition, there were variations between the types of families who home educate. Of the 259 families that responded, 177 (68%) were two-parent families; 58 (22%) were single-parent families; and extended and alternative forms of family made up 6% and 4% of the sample respectively.

Similarly, Rothermel's (2003) study found that home educators are not confined to a particular geographical area and also differ in regard to family type. The questionnaire survey was distributed via a home education list, which encompassed many different LAs. Moreover, there were differences noted with regard to family type. However, in contrast to Fortune-Wood's study, Rothermel (2003) found the differences to be small, because the vast majority of parents had an opposite sex partner (89%) and single parents accounted for only 7% of the sample.

Further, with regards to professional backgrounds of parents, both studies found that parents had a wide variety of educational backgrounds and careers. In terms of higher education, Rothermel (2003) found that 49% of mothers and 67% of fathers had attended university. In contrast, 26% of parents (both mother and father) had no post-school education. The largest professional group were school teachers and lecturers (13%), although at least 40% of families contained at least one trained teacher. The Arts also featured highly at 11% and parents working in manual jobs made up 10% of

the sample. These included jobs such as machinists, factory workers, labourers and lorry drivers. The smallest notable group was health professionals, working as doctors or nurses (4%).

Fortune-Wood's (2005) study also revealed that home educating parents had a wide variety of careers but emphasised that they were in the main well educated or pursued professional occupations, which echoes Rothermel's findings (2003). However despite this, Fortune-Wood (2005) mentions that the home educating families surveyed did not represent the stereotype of the middle class elite because they tended to be poorer than average due in part to family size and income.

The results indicated that the average family size was slightly larger than the national average (1.8 children compared to the national average of 1.6) with the majority of children (60%) living in families with 3 or more siblings, although this differed in single parent families. Further, the results indicated that if parents withdrew one child from school they were also more likely to withdraw their siblings. Of the 263 families sampled (representing 657 children) only 47 were attending school and of the school-going siblings more than three times the sample were aged between 11 and 16 years. In addition, the average income among the home educators that responded was £23,000, which is significantly lower than the national average income of £29,000 (based on 2001-2 figures: £561 per week as the median income for a family with two children).

Thus, the findings as outlined in Fortune-Wood (2005) and Rothermel's (2003) studies reveal that home educators represent a wide cross section of society, but there are also some commonalities with regards to family type or professional background. This could be attributed to the fact that in many cases home educating families have to survive on one income due to one parent (usually the mother) educating at home. Moreover, it is also important to mention that in both studies the majority of respondents were white. For example, Fortune-Wood (2005) outlined that 95% were white compared to fewer than 5% from ethnic minority groups.

However, just as the perception of home education as a middle class pursuit is changing, given the circumstances of families involved, it is also becoming more ethnically and culturally diverse. This is in evidence by the number of the ethnic and religious minority groups established for home education. One example is the Islamic Home School Advisory Service (ISHAN), which was founded in 2000 to provide advice and support for Muslim home educators; it has seen its 'numbers double' since its inception (El-Sawah, 2006, p1).

#### **4.2.2 US**

In the US, studies that have attempted to ascertain the total number and characteristics of home educating students have also revealed similar findings to the UK and there is a general consensus that home education is growing both in numbers and popularity. However, it is important to mention that estimates for the numbers of home educators vary considerably depending on the data set used. The most recent estimates provided by the National Home Education Research Institute (2011) outlined that in the spring of 2010 2.04 million children were home schooled in the US (4% of all school-aged children). There are currently no estimates for the 2011/12 period.

States that register home schoolers have also revealed the popularity of this provision. For example, Virginia had 3,816 registered home schoolers in 1990 and by 2007 the number had grown to 20,694. In Maryland, figures rose from 2,296 in 1990 to 24,227 in 2006 (Gaither, 2009a). Similarly in Florida, numbers increased from 22,200 in 1995 to about 51,100 in 2005 (Catalanello, 2005). Nevertheless, although home schooling has experienced growth in the US over the last three decades it is not being experienced in all states because home schooling falls under state law and these laws vary widely. Further, there are also variations evident with regard to the characteristics of the home educating population, although for the most part the research provides a comprehensive overview of the families involved.

The National Centre for Education Statistics Report (2003) found that white students were more likely to be home educated than Black or Hispanic students; students in households with three or more children were more likely to be home schooled than

students in households with fewer children; and students in two-parent households were more likely to be home schooled than students in households with one parent or guardian.

A national study conducted by Bielick *et al* (2001) also reported that a high proportion of home schooled students are Caucasian (75%) and that there were similarities in terms of family type and family size. However, the research also indicated that home education is diversifying, particularly with regard to ethnicity of the population. The research demonstrated that 25% of all home schooled students were from ethnic minority backgrounds and of these, African-Americans were found to make up a significant part.

Further evidence for the growing diversity of the home schooling community can be found by examining the number of online groups catering for such families. One of the largest groups for Black African Americans was co-founded in 2003 by Jennifer James entitled *The National African American Homeschoolers Alliance*. By 2006 the organisation had 3,000 members and the numbers are reported to be rising. James told the St Petersburg Times that African American families are embracing home schooling because ‘there’s this persistent achievement gap, and a lot of black children are doing so poorly in traditional schools that parents are looking for alternatives’ (St Petersburg Times, 2005).

Michael Smith, the president and co-founder of the US’s most powerful home school advocacy organisation (HSLDA), also acknowledged the growing diversity of the home schooling movement, particularly among Black Americans: ‘The Black home school movement is growing at a faster rate than the general home school population’ (cited in Gaither, 2009a, p13).

However, it is not only black families who are pursuing home education due to dissatisfaction with schooling; it is also becoming increasingly prevalent among other minority groups. Kraychir (2004) contends that a wide variety of ethnic American families who have similar or differing principles are now opting for home education



and this is represented by home school support organisations ‘for every race, religion, disability and political affiliation in the US today’ (p28).

The EHE population, as emphasised by US and UK research, is increasingly growing and diversifying to include families from different religious denominations and ethnic backgrounds. However, the diversity of the population is not only reflected by demographic profile but also in the reasons provided for pursuing this approach. The next section will outline the differing motivations for home education because it may go some way to explain why home education is growing in popularity, irrespective of family demographic or background.

### **4.3 Reasons**

The reasons for home education have been explored quite extensively in research, even in countries where home education research is limited (see Merry and Howell, 2009; Spiegler, 2010; Blok and Karsten, 2011). This is perhaps because it is arguably one of the easier topics to research, not just from a data collection point of view (questionnaire surveys) but also because it is unlikely to offend the sensibilities of home educators in the same way that more personal questions relating to home education practice or provision might.

One of the most notable studies concerning motives for EHE was conducted more than 30 years ago by Van Galen (1988) with 23 parents (16 home educating families) in a south eastern state of the US. Van Galen’s (1988) study categorised North American home scholars into two groups: ‘ideologues’ and ‘pedagogues’. The ‘ideologues’ were defined as those who object to what is taught in schools, they hold traditional conservative values and follow a philosophy of Christian fundamentalism. Whereas, ‘pedagogues’ have educational reasons for home schooling: school teaching is viewed as inept and limiting because it focuses solely on learning opportunities provided by the teacher. Van Galen (1988) distinguished homeschoolers as those who are dissatisfied with ‘content’ and those who are dissatisfied with ‘method’.

Although these categories can arguably still be used to define motivations of home educators (particularly in the US), the current situation is much more complex because the home education movement (in the US and abroad) has experienced growth and diversity over the last decade (Neuman, 2004). This has been substantiated by recent research on this area, which reveals the wide variety of motivations for EHE.

Rothermel's (2003) study is particularly noteworthy because it is one of the largest studies into EHE motivations in the UK. In total 419 EHE families took part (1099 children, eleven years and under). The findings from the questionnaire phase of the research indicated that parents had multiple reasons for home education which encompassed 'disappointment with education' and 'schools' (including SEN/gifted and talented provision); 'ideological reasons'; 'bullying'; and 'child depression and stress.' Other reasons provided in the study (although to a lesser extent) centred upon parental standards; parents' own negative school experiences; and peer pressure.

The reasons for home education were therefore many and varied and in some cases the motivation provided for home educating one child was not the same as the motivation for another. Thus, Rothermel (2003) held that home educators cannot be categorised according to a single coherent identity which generally has either spiritual ('New age Hippies') or religious connotations ('Radical fundamentalists') and in many instances only serve to reinforce negative stereotypes.

Parsons and Lewis's (2010) research study in the UK with 27 parents of SEN children also highlighted that EHE is undertaken for a wide variety of reasons. Moreover, in many cases it was a result of unforeseen circumstances rather than a 'true choice' because of negative experiences with formal provision (37%) and the perceived failure of schools to meet their child's needs adequately (30%). This was highlighted poignantly by one respondent: 'We are not choosing home education as an alternative lifestyle choice, but have been left with no other acceptable option' (p14).

Smith and Williams' (2009) study in the US with 24 Black home schooling parents (each parent representing a different family, 23 female and 1 male) also found 'push' factors away from formal education. The focus on Black parents was regarded as important by the authors because of the limited empirical work undertaken with home schooling African American families. The motivations for home schooling included negative experiences of public or private schools; media reports of failing public schools; the desire to facilitate their own child's learning; and to teach religious, moral, ethical, cultural and spiritual principles. The motivations of Black parents were therefore not dissimilar from those described in the literature (e.g. Green and Hover-Dempsey, 2007; Ray, 2000). However, where Black parents motivations diverged was their concern for the negative influences associated with racism in schools and their desire for more positive role models for their children.

Of the 24 Black home schooling parents interviewed, 19 attributed their decision to home school on perceptions of or experiences with inequalities, prejudice, discrimination or racism in public and private schools. In particular parents felt Black boys and girls encountered unconventional and unfair treatment which included low expectations and an unwillingness to consider their child's possible giftedness. Parents were also concerned about the presence of a labelling culture in schools with teachers categorising students as 'trouble makers' or having 'behavioural issues', rather than focusing on the promotion of academic standards.

Moreover, parents felt that Black children were judged more harshly by teachers and no provision was made for variations in Black students' learning styles, behaviours or needs. The school structure and climate were perceived to be detrimental to Black students, although it was deemed to be especially destructive for Black males, as one parent highlighted: 'I have African American boys and I think particularly African American boys are very distanced in school often, especially if they're not that typically bright student ... I just want them to be freer' (p376).

The literature on motivations indicates, therefore, that home educators are not a homogenous group but consist of a wide range of individuals who pursue this

provision for many different reasons. These include families who opt to home educate out of necessity because their children have special needs or have encountered bullying (which includes racial prejudice). Other families do so because they find home education a more convenient and flexible approach or because they have engaged in this practice for centuries, such as the Travelling community or Native Americans. Alternatively some families home educate as a temporary stopgap with the intention of returning to mainstream education.

It should not be seen as all that surprising that the various reasons for home education have influenced the practices adopted. In the US particularly, new hybrid forms of learning are emerging. This has made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between home schools and conventional schools. Many districts, for instance, allow children to receive a public school education at home for free through non-classroom based virtual schools or ‘cyber schools’. Others are experimenting with dual enrolment programmes that allow students to attend public schools part time and stay at home for the rest of the day. There are also opportunities for home school children to participate in after school activities (e.g. sports) or attend classes of interest (Gaither, 2009a).

The sweeping trend towards accommodation, adaptation and hybridisation in the US has arguably changed home schooling beyond recognition. This was supported by actress Jada Pinkett-Smith (who educates her two children along with film actor husband Will Smith) in a widely published US magazine article:

Home schooling is great because they (the children) can stay with us when we travel, and also because the school in this country – public and private – is designed for the industrial age. We’re in a technological age. We don’t want our kids to memorise. We want them to learn. (Essence Magazine, 2005)

Thus, as the literature on this area reveals, home education is no longer the preserve of conservative Christians or left wing liberals but instead includes families from different backgrounds who have numerous reasons for engaging in this provision.

The next section provides information relating to the methods of educating children at home. The terms ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ learning are discussed because both approaches are utilised by home educators.

## **4.4 Methods of educating children at home**

Research suggests that the education styles and practices utilised by home educators are diverse and broad in scope. Methods of education may vary, for example from highly structured and ‘formal’ programmes of learning, where families utilise free online teaching and learning resources (the National Curriculum is rarely followed), to highly ‘informal’, less conventional approaches to learning where practices are responsive to the child’s developing interests (see Parsons and Lewis, 2010; Thomas and Pattison, 2007; DCSF, 2007). To fully understand the different approaches home educators use it is necessary to define the terms ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ learning.

Formal learning is often assumed to be superior to informal learning because it is perceived as opening up the accumulated wisdom of humankind and is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom based and highly structured. Whereas, informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions but it is not typically classroom based or highly structured, and control of learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner (see Lave and Wenger, 1991; Bentley, 1998; Davies, 2008). Formal learning at home, however, would probably be regarded as quite informal in school because parents can take advantage of those times when their children are most receptive to learning, including evenings and weekends. Similarly, informal learning at home is specific to home because children learn through living from everyday experiences (Thomas and Pattison, 2007).

The opportunities for learning from both approaches, therefore, are not to be underestimated because both formal and informal methods can complement learning. In fact, some researchers argue that formal and informal learning cannot be easily or clearly separated off from learning (see Garrick, 1997; McGivney, 1999; Eraut, 2000). This is because learning is predominantly determined by complex social

practices and as such home education may include elements of formal learning, just as aspects of schooling are sites of informal learning.

Certainly, research into home education appears to suggest that long-term home educators and their children prefer to use a mixture of formal and informal learning methods. The move away from a 'school at home' approach represents a gradual paradigmatic shift away from viewing 'formal education = bad, informal = good', or vice versa (Dowty, 2000). Instead, families come to realise that both approaches can offer opportunities for learning and discovery. Fortune-Wood's (2005) study, for example, revealed that home educators use a variety of techniques to try and accommodate different age ranges and learning styles, although in many cases the central aims were similar. Parents were keen to promote independence among their children and foster a diverse and fun learning environment. Children may share in activities, read for pleasure, help with household tasks, follow particular interests or use a computer, and so on. Parents recognised and valued individualised learning because they felt it impacted positively on their child's approach to learning, as one parent noted: 'We were not satisfied with the level of educational provision in our eldest daughter's school. There was a total lack of individual learning and we feel that it was detrimental to her long term prospects' (p31).

In addition, research conducted by Thomas and Pattison (2007) found that learning is embedded and contextualised in real-life situations, and as a result learning can take place in a myriad of ways in virtually all circumstances and subject matters. Learning maths for example, may include revising topic books but it can also be fostered by engaging in household activities, such as shopping or dividing out quantities in order to bake cakes. Moreover, topics of interest may be sparked off from talking to others, watching a programme or researching an entirely different area. As such, children can follow through on anything that captures their interest, either under their own steam or with the active support of their parent.

Informal learning, therefore, is not just restricted to childhood, it is part of life, and while people are living they are quite possibly learning, at some level, all or more of the time (Dale and Bell, 1999). Commentators in the adult education and lifelong

learning fields (where most of the research into informal learning is focused) also question the value and validity of seeing formal and informal dimensions of learning as separate and distinct from each other. McGivney (1999), for example, outlined that it is difficult to make a clear distinction between formal and informal learning as there is often a crossover between the two.

Eraut (2000), who is the UK's leading researcher into how professionals learn in workplace settings (the study of informal learning is often confined to adults), also found that most learning occurs informally during normal working processes and that there is considerable scope for recognising and enhancing such learning. As a result, Eraut (2000) expresses a strong preference for the term 'non-formal' rather than 'informal'. This is because informal learning carries with it connotations of

so many other features of a situation, such as dress, discourse, behaviour, diminution of social differences – that its colloquial application as a descriptor of learning contexts may have little to do with learning per se. (p12)

For Eraut (2000) the term 'informal learning' carries unwanted and confusing implications, and it is also too wide to be of much use. Second, Eraut (2000) set out a schema for identifying different types of non-formal learning based, for example, on the timing of the stimulus (past, current, future) and the extent to which such learning is tacit (tacit, reactive or deliberative). This latter dimension is later set against another, identifying different types of thought or action (reading of the situation, decision making, overt activity, metacognitive processes). Finally, Eraut (2000) classifies non-formal learning as either individual or social, and either implicit or explicit.

However, although Eraut (2000) introduced the term 'non-formal' as a substitute for what he perceives as the less precise 'informal' learning, other researchers disagree over the use of this category, in so far that the term 'non-formal' is defined by what it is not – formal. Similar to its predecessor, 'non-formal' also invites dualism and will inevitably be contrasted with formal education. Instead, researchers argue that the respective benefits of formality and informality and how productive balances between the two can be sustained is a more useful discussion. Scribner and Cole (1973), for

example, signalled 40 years ago that focusing on the differences between formal and informal learning risks restricting the reach of such theories to predominantly non-educational settings. It also reinforces the view that formal learning is superior to informal learning rather than focusing on the processes and experiences involved in each.

Broadly, the research indicates that it is more useful to examine dimensions of formal and informal learning in ways in which they interrelate with each other, instead of focusing on the boundaries between these types of learning. It is beyond the scope of this section to present all the arguments surrounding formal and informal learning and also it is not entirely applicable. This section was concerned merely with offering a critique of the research available. The purpose of this was to indicate that the categories used to define ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ learning are not mutually exclusive. In other words, they are not sacrosanct in relation to setting goals and pedagogy. Some aspects of EHE may in fact be formal, while some aspects of schooling are informal. Chapter 8 summarises in more detail the methods used by families and the extent to which they facilitate and complement EHE learning and practice.

The next section discusses the outcomes of EHE for both children and parents, providing further context about home education and its perceived benefits, including academic and social gains.

## **4.5 Outcomes**

Research studies into the outcomes and experiences of EHE families have found that this approach is largely advantageous for both children and parents (see Webb, 1999; Rothermel, 2002). It is important to mention, however, that the research conducted in the UK and Continental Europe on this area (similar to research on home education generally) is relatively small scale and convenience sampling is employed in many cases. The US, by contrast, has a number of large-scale studies undertaken in this area (see Rudner, 1999; Sutton and Galloway, 2000; Chang-Martin *et al*, 2011).

Nevertheless, these studies have to be examined with caution and take into account the aims and objectives of the authors, funders of the research and possible sampling



bias. The US, in comparison to the UK, has powerful home school advocacy organisations that either conduct research or employ researchers on their behalf (e.g. the Home School League Defence Association; National Home Education Research Institute).

#### **4.5.1 Children and young people**

One of the most notable studies that assessed the outcomes of home education for children and young people was conducted by US academic Rudner (1999). It is noteworthy because it is one of the largest studies ever undertaken into the academic performance of home schoolers with an achieved sample size of 20,760 students out of a possible sample of 39,607. All of the students who took part in the study were accessed through Bob Jones University Press Testing and Evaluation Service (a Christian Institution in South Carolina) which measures students' academic performance through standardised tests. The home schooling students and their parents agreed to their tests been made public prior to knowing the test results.

The Iowa Tests of Basic Skills were administered to children in Kindergarten through to eighth grade, and the Tests of Achievement and Proficiency were administered to children in Grades 9 to 12. The tests were divided into six separate academic subsets: composite with computation (blend of all subsets but independently normed); reading total; language; mathematics total with computation; social studies; and science.

The results indicated that home schooled students excelled academically because the median test scores were typically in the 70<sup>th</sup> to 80<sup>th</sup> percentile. In addition, home school students also compared favourably to or outperformed their peers enrolled in other forms of private education. For example, 'at each grade level, the performance of home school students is above the performance levels of students enrolled in Catholic/private schools' (Rudner, 1999, p16). Further, the data indicated that students who are home schooled for their entire academic life do better than students who have only been home schooled for a few years.

Nonetheless, Rudner (1999) did acknowledge that the results could not be generalised to the home school population because it focused on a specific cohort that consisted primarily of white Christians who used the Bob Jones University standardised testing programme. In addition, Welner and Welner (1999), who offered a critique of Rudner's (1999) study, argued that although they did not disagree with Rudner's conclusions regarding home schoolers' performance they emphasised that it had to be viewed tentatively. Although Rudner is an accomplished scholar in the field of assessment, he has testified on behalf of home schoolers and also received funding for the study from one of the largest home school advocacy organisations, HSLDA (although this was acknowledged in Rudner's study).

Similarly, Brian Ray who has conducted many research studies into home schooling also has vested interests in this area: he not only home schooled his own children but also established the National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) in 1990, of which he is president. Even so, despite personal affiliations Ray is a high profile figure in the home school movement because the research studies conducted have included home schoolers from a cross section of society and have provided information about demographics, characteristics, experiences and outcomes.

One of the first large-scale studies Ray (1990) conducted into home school outcomes included approximately 1,500 families and 4,600 children. The results found that EHE children out-performed their counterparts in public schools on standardised achievement tests by 30 to 37 percentile points in all subjects (reading, language, maths, science and social studies). In addition, EHE children were regarded to be socially successful because age was not a barrier to social engagement due to the incorporation of diverse learning experiences and affiliation to home school groups.

These findings have been similarly substantiated in the UK by Rothermel's (2002) research into the psychosocial and academic development of approximately 400 EHE children (under the age of eleven). The results highlighted that EHE children performed well above national average in national literacy tests: 64% of EHE reception-aged children scored over 75% on their Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) baseline assessments as opposed to 51% of children nationally. In

addition, the psychosocial instruments confirmed that EHE children were socially adept and independent thinkers with limited behavioural problems.

However, more recently Chang-Martin *et al*'s (2011) US study, which was conducted with home schooled children and their school-age peers (37 home schooled and 37 public schooled children aged between 5 and 10), found that different outcomes may be produced depending on the type of home school practised. The results revealed that the children who received structured home schooling (25) were superior when compared to a similar group of children (37) enrolled in public school across all seven subsets (e.g. maths and English). This was tested using multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). In addition, when the MANOVA was recalculated to account for family yearly income and maternal education, the patterns of findings were not affected.

The exception to this rule was noted with regards to autonomously educated children who 'rarely' or 'never' used structured curricula or lesson plans. Following *t* test comparisons on each of the subsets separately (given the smaller sample) the children in this group (12) achieved the lowest scores throughout when compared to public schooled children and structured homeschoolers, and they also fell below grade level in four of the seven subject areas. The results were also not impacted by yearly family income and maternal education.

Given the evident differences between the groups, particularly on comparing structured and unstructured children, Chang-Martin *et al* (2011) argue that the clear advantage of home schooling, at least in terms of performance on academic tests, may be limited to situations where parents create structured environments. At present, it is impossible to know with any certainty what methods produce the best outcomes because of limited research and difficulties surrounding access. This study, therefore, certainly raises interesting questions about the best practices associated with this provision and whether similar patterns would have emerged with a larger sample.

Positive findings have also been reported with respect to outcomes for home educated teenagers and young people, but again the research has to be viewed with caution in

line with the limitations mentioned above. Research on this area has highlighted that EHE young people continue to experience academic and personal success throughout their life course.

Sutton and Galloway's (2000) research is evidence of this as their nationwide survey investigated the success of undergraduate college graduates from home schools (21), private schools (26) and public schools (17). Data included 40 indicators of college success reflecting five domains of learning outcomes: achievement, leadership, professional aptitude, social behaviour and physical activity. The results revealed that there were no significant differences among the three groups in 33 of the 40 variables.

However, results from multivariate analysis of variance showed college graduates from home schools held significantly more leadership posts (e.g. academic officers) for significantly greater periods of time than did the private school group (although the public school group remained unaffected). Sutton and Galloway (2000) contend that home education 'is an increasingly viable educational option' because the results highlighted that home schooled students compared favourably to or excelled in certain areas (leadership domain) in relation to their private or public school counterparts.

Research commissioned by the Home School Legal Defence Association (Ray, 2003) into the outcomes of home schooled adults (sample size 7,300, 5000 of whom had been home schooled for at least seven years) also revealed positive findings. Seventy four percent of home schooled adults (aged 18 to 24) took college level courses compared to the national average of 46%. Moreover, home schooled adults were considered to be more active and involved in their communities with 71% engaging in ongoing community service activities (e.g. coaching a sports team) compared to 37% of US adults of similar ages (18 to 24).

UK research on this area has also revealed that EHE young people are well adjusted and successful. Webb's (1999) research with 20 EHE adults revealed that they participated in a range of extracurricular activities, were active in their communities and engaged in a variety of employment and ongoing education courses.

A more detailed analysis of the outcomes of EHE for children and young people is discussed in Chapter 10 alongside my results.

### **4.5.2 Parents**

Research has indicated that positive outcomes of home education are not solely confined to children as there is evidence that it impacts positively upon parents and enhances family life. One study which succinctly emphasised this view was conducted by US researcher Wyatt (2008) who specifically explored home school family ties and relationships. The results of this study indicated that home school families reported improved relationships with their children because of the increased time they were spending engaging and interacting with their children.

Similarly, Hanna's (2011) comprehensive study over a period of ten years (1998–2008) in urban, rural and suburban areas of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania found that home schooling parents were generally positive about their experiences and wanted to continue for the sake of their children and the family unit at large. This is in evidence by the fact that in the majority of cases the principal instructor remained a constant in data collections over a ten-year period. For example, the number of families who decided to stay at home to educate their children was 310 in 1998 as opposed to 239 in 2008. However, Hanna (2011) mentions that this difference can be attributed to a parent returning to work in families where both parents provided instruction.

Research in the UK has also indicated the wider impact of EHE upon parents and families. Fortune-Wood's (2006) survey specifically focused on EHE parents (263) who had a child with special needs (SEN). The study found that addressing a child's SEN in a suitable environment had positive implications for the whole family. Parents cited reduced stress as the second highest effect of home educating after financial concerns. For example, 'I'm skint. I'm knackered. The house is a bomb site, but I have a great relationship with my kids. It's a huge ... privilege to see them testing their skills and finding their potential on a daily basis' (p78).

In addition, some parents found that home educating their children had opened up new opportunities which they would not otherwise have considered or had access too.

One parent reported that her experience of EHE led to her changing career paths and getting a job in education. Others said that it affected their outlook and political position due in part to membership of national (62% were members of Education Otherwise) and local support organisations (38%).

The decision to EHE had also, in some cases, enriched their relationship with their extended family. Nearly 30% of participants reported a positively improved relationship compared to only one in five (19%) of parents who felt that their relationship deteriorated following their decision to EHE. This differs from Fortune-Wood's earlier research which revealed that almost half of the sample had problems with family members following their decision to EHE (see Fortune-Wood, 2005).

Thomas and Pattison's (2007) research, which explored how children learn at home and focused specially on the UK context, also made reference to the benefits of EHE for both parents and children. This focused in particular on facilitating and maintaining parent-child bonds: 'Of course a lot of parent-child interaction is not about learning or even passing on knowledge or finding out. It is simply about being together, doing things together and enjoying each other's company' (p74).

The existing US and UK research on outcomes, therefore, appears to echo literature on EHE more broadly: it suggests that this provision is undertaken for many different reasons and by different families. However, despite this, the research indicates that outcomes for EHE are markedly similar. In particular these include increased parent-child bonds, and academic and social success. The fact that these two strands interrelate (see Hartas, 2011) and may inadvertently affect outcomes for home education was rarely mentioned in the literature provided.

Thus, the research on outcomes has to be treated with caution in line with EHE research generally because, as mentioned, EHE has experienced a resurgence of interest only relatively recently and access to the community is difficult (explained in detail in the next chapter). This has meant that the research available on outcomes is relatively small scale (particularly in the UK and Continental Europe) and tends to be conducted by those in the community or who have professional affiliations with

research councils (such as in the US). Nevertheless, this section has summarised the main points of interest concerning the outcomes for EHE children and families as a whole. A further critique of the outcomes literature will be provided in Chapter 10.

### **4.5.3 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has revealed that EHE is both a topical and timely area of study. The existing research has indicated that home education is undertaken by families of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds and this is reflected (to some extent) in the diverse array of motivations provided. Moreover, the literature suggests that the EHE movement is unlikely to recede any time soon because much of the research available indicates continued sustainability and/or growth, due in part to reported positive outcomes.

The examination of EHE literature has also helped to shape the study under investigation because it reveals key areas of interest (e.g. motivations) and also areas which require further study because of gaps in knowledge (e.g. outcomes). This thesis is thus broad in scope in order to reflect the key themes in EHE but also to acknowledge those which require further enquiry. The research questions are framed around the experiences of home educating families which include motivations, home education practice, outcomes and societal perception. Further, the research includes children and young people's voices (alongside adults) because to date they have been marginalised in EHE research.

The next chapter will restate the research questions that guide this study, underline their rationale and summarise the research design and methods used.

## Section four

# Design and Analysis



# 5 Chapter 5: Methodology

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines how the choice of topic (home education) impacted the subsequent research process, from the research questions through to the choice of methodology (case study). Thus, this chapter explains how and why this study was formed, the nature of inquiry pursued as a result and the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach.

As mentioned previously (Chapter 1), I did not have any personal or professional affiliations to the topic under investigation. I decided to research it solely from a point of interest. However, being ‘outside’ of a research field posed its own problems which I had not fully realised prior to commencing this study. The most notable one is access, which is discussed in detail below.

## 5.2 Access

Access to a population in the broadest sense implies a process that facilitates gathering of empirical data. Brown *et al* (1976) referred to the process of access as being a part of a ‘knowledge production system’. However, to allow that process to occur, and therefore to allow knowledge to be produced, there has to exist a relationship between the researcher and the research environment. This was outlined by Hammersley and Atkinson (1995):

... the process of achieving access is not merely a practical matter. Not only does its achievement depend on theoretical understanding ... but the discovery of obstacles to access, and the effective means of overcoming them, itself provides insights into the social organisation of the setting. (p54)

Thus, an individual researcher is forced to confront a number of interrelated access problems in order to develop a relationship with the research environment that includes entry to settings, initial contacts and gatekeepers. To that end, access is rarely defined in terms of a single event that occurs during the beginning of the research, but

as a continuing and evolving process where interaction between researcher and researched directly influence the course that a research programme takes (Duggan-Chawla, 2007).

In terms of an ‘outsider’ wishing to open up a new field of investigation building trust between researcher and researched is vital, because that relationship can influence the direction of the research programme. However the question is how is that trust developed? And with whom? Brown *et al* (1976) suggested:

In order to build up such trust or to understand the lack of it, the researcher will have to ask himself (herself) several questions in order to locate himself (herself) in the knowledge production system. S/he must ask such questions as why do I do research? For whom do I work?. (p14-15)

I certainly took heed of this advice and asked myself numerous questions about how I could build relationships and foster trust within the EHE community as an ‘outsider’. I realised quite early on in the PhD that accessing participants was going to be a difficult and time-consuming process. First, because home educators are not required to register with their LAs and second, the publication of the Badman Review into Elective Home Education (2009) heightened and polarised tensions that already existed within the home education community towards researchers who are viewed as ‘outsiders’/‘outside of the field’ (see Nelson, 2011; Lees, 2011). I therefore decided that accessing a local home education group would be useful as it would not only help to increase my awareness and understanding of an under-researched area, but it could also have a positive impact on the research process and its trajectory.

It is important to mention, however, that being granted access to a home education group was not easy, which echoes the problems I encountered more generally with regards to access (discussed in problems encountered section). I contacted a number of local EHE groups before I got a positive response from a female organiser (a home educating parent) who I had contacted via the group’s website. The organiser of the group was happy for me to attend once she had ‘vetted me’. I met her for coffee and explained my intentions regarding attendance and participation in the group. Most

specifically I outlined that I was interested in taking part in the group to help clarify the direction of my study.

### **5.2.1 Involvement in EHE group**

The home education group I attended met every fortnight in a village hall and consisted of five families with ten children aged from 4 to 15. I came to know and build relationships with these families over a 12-month period but it certainly required persistence and patience on my part as I tried hard to integrate myself within the group. I was fully aware that I was viewed as an ‘outsider’ by the group initially so I had to work hard to build the trust of the parents (mothers regularly attended the group, fathers did occasionally) and their children.

I tried to do this by immersing myself wholeheartedly with the environmental activities and day trips that the group participated in. For example, I went pond-dipping, butterfly catching and visited a hermit in the Stiperstones (hill in the county of Shropshire) to name a few. I also took part in the organised activities for the John Muir Award that the children were working towards in the village hall. These activities centred on fair trade and included the following: understanding where coco is produced and thinking about the purpose and benefits of fair trade (examples of activities pursued are provided in the Results Chapter).

Participating in these activities with the children and their parents helped to clarify the direction of my study. In particular, it helped reaffirm my commitment to disseminating children’s views. I realised that home educated children had much to offer the home education debate in terms of their own personal experiences. A ‘eureka moment’ came when one of the older children (15-year-old girl) mentioned that a ‘cool’ and ‘exciting’ research project could include snap shots of their lives, essentially who they are, what they enjoy doing, how they learn and who they learn with. Prior to this I had only really contemplated conducting interviews with families about their day-to-day experiences (after spending time in the field and examining literature on the area), and I certainly had not thought about focusing in-depth on a small number of children. However, I realised that in these circumstances less was

truly more because I had developed a rapport with these children and was also aware that gaining access to children, particularly home educating children, would be difficult.

### **5.2.2 Wider involvement**

Involvement with this first group of EHE families also increased my confidence to contact and talk to as many other home educating families as possible, both in the UK and abroad. I also believe that access to two other groups (one UK based and one in the Netherlands) was almost certainly helped by my involvement in the local environmental EHE group and the promise of a character reference if needed.

The second UK-based group (also based in the West Midlands) contacted me after I posted on a home education web forum about the possibility of visiting and talking to families about their experiences. I visited this group, generally on Fridays, over a six to eight month period because this is when the two families met (five children ranging in age from 4 to 13 were involved in the group).

The second group, although smaller than the environmentally focused group, was advantageous from the point of view that I got to see in detail the wide range of activities that the families engaged in and the approaches pursued in a home setting. I also had the opportunity to talk to the children and their parents about their reasons for EHE and their experiences, both positive and negative.

During such conversations, what became apparent was the lack of research about what happens to EHE children and young people post 16. In essence, where do they go and what do they do when they leave EHE? For one of the mothers the topic was particularly pertinent as her eldest daughter was 13 and she was considering whether Emma should take formal qualifications (GCSEs) or whether to dismiss them entirely. I realised then, that researching the outcomes of EHE would be an interesting area to pursue alongside the views of parents and children. I could explore the views of those currently being home educated or home educating while also ascertaining how EHE shaped or influenced individuals who were no longer classified as home educated (i.e.

16 upwards) and the paths they pursued in terms of employment, education or training.

Lastly, I was involved in a group in the Netherlands. I successfully obtained U21 Scholarship funding to visit the Netherlands for a month in order to gain additional insight into EHE practice and regulation in other countries. I participated in a local home education group during this period and spoke to the parents and the children (the children were all relatively young, under six). The families all gathered in a local park when I visited because it was summer, although in the autumn and winter they mentioned that they make use of indoor facilities. The conversations I had with the parents were similarly engaging and informative on the topic of EHE because they mentioned the wide range of resources and practices used. However, I realised that including the Netherlands group in my PhD would not work from a time and cost perspective. But more than that, I decided after spending time with the children both in the group and in their family homes (I was invited to visit two family homes) that the views of children who are slightly older (seven and above) might be more advantageous in terms of gaining an in-depth insight into their experiences.

Thus, participation in these groups and the conversations I had with home educators (via the phone or in person) all helped to shape the direction of this study, and ultimately led to the development of the following research questions:

### **5.3 Research questions**

1. Why is home education undertaken by families?
2. How is home education practised?
3. What are the experiences of parents, children and young people who have been or are currently engaged in this provision?
4. What are the outcomes for home educated young people concerning qualifications and employment?
5. What are the views of parents, children and young people regarding how home education is perceived in society?
6. What changes would parents, children and young people like to see for home education moving forward?

The research questions focus for the most part on the experiences of families (adults, children and young people), whether that be their motivations for EHE, their daily routine, the general perception of EHE, or the extent to which they see EHE evolving or developing in the future. The only exception to this is the question on the outcomes of EHE (RQ 4) because, as mentioned above, it was thought to be of interest to the community in question and would help to fill gaps in the existing literature. While there is limited UK research on the experiences of EHE families (particularly from a child's perspective) there is even less research on the outcomes of EHE (explored in detail in the results section).

The next section provides an overview of the two distinct types of research inquiry and outlines why I decided to choose the qualitative approach, both in nature and method. Moreover, the reasons underpinning the research strategy (case study) are discussed in relation to this study.

## **5.4 Research methodology**

In academic research, either qualitative or quantitative methods are utilised to answer research questions, or on occasions a mixed methods approach is adopted.

Quantitative-based research is certainly seen in many research quarters as the method to use primarily because it is the method preferred by government departments and funding bodies. Quantitative-based approaches are regarded as likely to provide solutions or a 'scientific' justification for government decisions due to data (numbers or statistics) being collected and analysed objectively (Greenbank, 2003; Wilson, 2002). In contrast, qualitative methods are regarded as more subjective in nature primarily because they tend to use the spoken and written word to reach conclusions (Greenbank, 2003). In essence, qualitative inquiry is carried out

because a problem or issue needs to be explored ... we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study. (Creswell 2007, p40)

For my research, qualitative inquiry was regarded as the most suitable and effective because the purpose of my research (as indicated by my research questions) was exploring the views and experiences of home educated/educating parents, children and young people. Although quantitative methods, for example using questionnaires, can gather information about views and experiences, the ‘richness’ and ‘depth’ of the data is limited. Further, I wanted to ensure that participants felt part of the research process, rather than as individuals to be ‘studied’, given the complexities of researching this group with regards to access.

Finally, a quantitative approach which places emphasis on large-scale surveys (or secondary data analysis) was not viable for this study as there is no formal registration system for home educators in the UK, which means that access to a large number of home educators would be problematic, if not impossible. It may also explain why most of the research conducted on home education in the UK is qualitative in nature (see Thomas and Pattison, 2007; Lees, 2011).

The research strategy decided upon (case study) was similarly chosen because it was felt to be the most suited to the aims of this study.

#### **5.4.1 Case study research**

The term case study is synonymous, according to Bryman (2001), with the intensive examination of a particular location, organisation or community for the purpose of investigating social reality. This method is therefore useful when exploring ‘how’ and ‘why’ something might have happened or why it might be the case due to the great deal of intricate study involved (Yin, 1993). Moreover, this approach does not dictate the methods employed because it is about incorporating a wide variety of strategies to facilitate understanding and indeed learning of certain environments and topic areas (Verschuren, 2003; Punch, 2005).

Thus, because my research is concerned with ascertaining views and experiences from the home educating community with the purpose of discovering more broadly why home education is being undertaken by families and how this educational provision impacts upon parents, children and young people, it was regarded as the most

appropriate approach. Also, the flexibility offered by case study research was advantageous as within a case study the same phenomenon may be approached via documentary sources, observations and interviews. Given, the wide range of participants in my study from adults to young people and children, it was felt that different methods could be utilised or adapted depending on the age or location of individuals.

The following quotes from two leading scholars in the field (Yin, 1993; Stake, 2005) outline succinctly the theoretical assumptions of case study research and its implications for data collection techniques:

#### **5.4.1.1 Defining case study research**

In brief, the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. ... In general case studies are the preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed. (Yin, 1993, p3)

Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what it is to be studied. ... By whatever methods we choose to study the case. We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated methods or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods – but we concentrate at least for the time being on the case. (Stake, 2005, p443)

Therefore, as the quotes summarise the case study method is a kind of research that concentrates on one thing, looking at it in detail (Thomas, 2011). Nevertheless, it is important to mention that not all case studies are approached with the same purpose or goal in mind.

Stake (1995) identifies three main types of case study:

##### **5.4.1.1.1 Defining your case**

**Intrinsic**, 'If the study is undertaken because, first and last, one wants better understanding of this particular case.'



**Instrumental**, ‘If a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalisation.’

**Multiple and collective**, when a ‘number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition.’

The purpose of my study is intrinsic or ‘curiosity driven research’ (Thomas, 2011) because I am interested in the phenomenon in its own right and do not have a secondary purpose in mind. Stake (2005) suggests a study is intrinsic when

the study is undertaken, because, first and last, one wants better understanding of this particular case. It is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but instead because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, the case itself is of interest. (p445)

Thus, interpretive research assumes that the social world is indivisible, complex and should be studied in its completeness (Thomas, 2011). Given this, it is arguably unsurprising that interpretive research is regarded as synonymous with case study or seen as the ‘classic approach’ to doing a case study. However, it is important to recognise that despite the advantages of this method and its suitability for my study, there are also limitations to this approach as the following two authors summarise:

#### **5.4.2 Limitations of case study research**

The case study has long been (and continues to be) stereotyped as a weak sibling among social science research methods. Investigators who do case studies are regarded as having downgraded their academic disciplines. (Yin, 1993, pxiii)

... case-orientated researchers are always open to the charge that their findings are specific to the few cases they examine, and when they do make broad comparisons and attempt to generalize, they are often accused of letting their favourite case shape, or at least colour, their generalisations. (Ragin, 1989, pix)

The criticisms of case study research, therefore, centre upon the difficulties of developing general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies, and ensuring reliability and validity. Nonetheless, it can be argued that case study is not

alone in its shortcomings regarding generalisability or trustworthiness because it is a central criticism of qualitative research generally, as Stake (1995) summarised: 'Qualitative study has everything wrong with it that is detractors claim. ... Qualitative inquiry is subjective. New problems are produced more frequently than solutions to old ones' (p45).

The criticisms directed at qualitative research, has led several writers on research methods, notably Guba (1990), to demonstrate how qualitative researchers can incorporate measures that deal with these issues. For example, Guba (1990) proposes four criteria that are employed by the positivist investigator:

- (a) credibility (in preference to internal validity)
- (b) transferability (in preference to external validity/generalisability)
- (c) dependability (in preference to reliability)
- (d) confirmability (in preference to objectivity)

However, although Guba's (1990) constructs have been accepted by many (see Silverman, 2010), some academics refute the idea that qualitative researchers should be concerned with the issues of generalisability, reliability (consistency of findings) and validity (the extent to which the tool measures what it claims to measure) because these notions have been imported from particular kinds of research and their meaning in qualitative research is far less clear. Indeed, Thomas (2010) argues that the seeking of generalisability can inhibit or even extinguish the curiosity and interpretation that can come from phronesis, where understanding presented from another's horizon of meaning is understood from one's own. The case study thus offers an example from which one's experience, one's phronesis, enables one to gather insight or understand a problem: 'Questioning is the starting point; serendipity, noticing, and insight provide an elevation, and interpretation based on phronesis is the key' (Thomas, 2010, p579).

This is also supported by Hammersley (2007) who suggests that what is good evidence for abduction, the development of an explanatory or theoretical idea often resulting from close examination of a particular case, is different from what is good evidence for induction.

Similar arguments are also levelled at concerns over reliability and validity. For example, as Thomas (2011) outlines:

The case study, as a study of one thing, is not the kind of inquiry in which considerations about validity and reliability should be to the fore since it is the singleness of the subject and the singleness – the peculiarity, even – of the interpretation and analysis of the evidence that is significant. (p66)

Moreover, criticisms directed at case study research with respect to reliability and validity also fail to consider that case study research encompasses component methods, so attention to validity and reliability can be addressed through the triangulation of sources. The practice of methodological triangulation, wherein phenomena are examined and analysed from independent perspectives that utilise distinct methods is widely used in case study research (Stake, 1995, p114). This means that while focus groups and interviews may suffer from some common methodological shortcomings, since both are interviews, their distinct characteristics also result in individual strengths (Robson *et al*, 2004). The use of different methods thus compensates for their individual limitations and exploits their respective benefits.

### **5.4.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has established why I decided to investigate the topic of EHE and how the preliminary field work led to the development of specific research questions and the nature and type of inquiry pursued.

The next chapter will summarise the research design and the methods used.

# **6 Chapter 6: Methods**

## **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter contains a description of the methods used to gather my research and outlines how I designed and piloted my research instruments and selected my sample. Ethical considerations and problems I encountered when conducting my research are also discussed as are the processes used to analyse the results.

## **6.2 Qualitative approaches**

The methods used to gather my data consisted of a variety of different qualitative approaches: individual interviews, focus groups and task-based activities (including photo collages and short stories) because, as previously mentioned, my research explores the views and experiences of home educating/educated parents, children and young people. A ‘one size fits all’ approach to data collection was, therefore, regarded as unsuitable because of the different age range of participants. I was also aware that data collection could take place in a number of locations (e.g. home/museums/camp sites) given difficulties around access to the community. Thus, just as I had to be flexible with location, the methods used also had to be adapted according to the wishes or needs of the participants.

I will firstly provide a description of the benefits and limitations of using individual interviews and focus groups in research. Individual interviews were used with the majority of participants in this study (adults, children and young people) while focus groups were used on occasions with children and young people. I will then explain the reasons for the inclusion of child-centred methods in this study and their strengths and limitations.

### **6.2.1 Interview**

Cohen *et al* (2000) define a research interview as a ‘two person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining people’s views and perceptions on a topic of mutual interest’ (p269). Interviews, therefore, have distinct

advantages because they provide a researcher with access to participants' attitudes, norms, beliefs and preferences as they allow access to 'what is inside a person's head' (Cohen *et al*, 2000, p268). This in turn is useful for eliciting greater depth and understanding than is the case with other methods of data collection (Punch, 2005). Moreover, interviews according to Bryman (2001) are better placed for handling more difficult and open-ended questions, which is particularly pertinent for my study given that EHE is a politicised topic and also one that is interested in obtaining exploratory information.

However, there are also limitations to interviews simply by virtue of eliciting rich, detailed information because the information is prone to subjectivity and bias on behalf of the interviewer (Cohen *et al*, 2000). Furthermore, interviews are time and labour intensive both for participants and researchers. Nonetheless, even taking into account these limitations, this technique was regarded as the most effective for the purpose of my study. Primarily because it allowed me to gather in-depth information and also allowed flexibility in the approach adopted.

#### **6.2.1.1 Type of interview**

According to Cohen *et al* (2000) there are three main kinds of interviews that may be used specifically as research tools: (a) the structured interview; (b) the unstructured interview; and (c) the semi-structured interview. The approach that was most suited to my study was a semi-structured interview because it is suitable for all age groups (Punch, 2005) and also allowed me to develop a series of open-ended questions, whilst providing opportunities for participants to ask questions. According to Bryman (2001) this helps to ensure high validity because the meaning behind an action may be revealed as the interviewee is able to speak for themselves with little direction from the interviewer. In addition, semi-structured interviews are also amenable to both face-to-face and telephone interaction. This was beneficial for my study because I wanted to access a diverse range of participants and travelling to meet participants was not always viable because of time and cost limitations.

Nevertheless, I acknowledge that the interview approaches adopted (face to face or telephone) have specific limitations, similar to other interview approaches. For

example, in face-to-face interviews some respondents may limit the information they provide because of a lack of anonymity. In contrast, respondents in telephone interviews may feel more at ease providing sensitive data but they are often more difficult to conduct because non-verbal cues are absent. The lack of non-verbal cues was one reason why I decided not to use this method with children. In addition, research has suggested that children generally feel more involved and at ease with a researcher when rapport or a level of trust has been established, which generally lends itself to face-to-face interaction (Lewis and Lindsay, 2000; Clark and Moss, 2001/2005). However, in spite of the limitations evident both in relation to face-to-face and telephone interviews (summarised in the problems encountered section), the strengths of these approaches and their applicability to this study outweighed their weaknesses and resulted in their inclusion.

### **6.2.2 Focus groups**

Focus groups were also used in this study because they too have distinct advantages. Bryman (2004) outlines that a focus group interview is

a form of interview in which there are several participants; there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particularly fairly defined topic; and the accent is upon interaction within the group and the joint conversation of meaning. (p337)

Thus, a focus group allows a researcher to collect data relatively quickly from a number of participants. It also enables participants to follow their own agendas 'and to develop themes most important to them' (Cohen *et al*, 2000). Furthermore, focus groups are more 'naturalistic' than individual interviews (i.e. closer to everyday conversation) in that they typically include a range of communicative processes such as storytelling, challenge and disagreement, which is a normal part of social life. In turn this can lead to the production of more elaborated accounts because respondents can react to and build upon the responses of other group members (Bryman, 2004). This is particularly useful when interviewing children or young people who generally have less experience than adults of being asked for their views and experiences. Thus, they may get comfort or develop in confidence as a result of being interviewed with their peers.

However, there are limitations to this approach simply by virtue of the number of participants simultaneously involved, which raises the problem of group effects. This includes the obvious problems of dealing with reticent speakers or those who take centre stage (Bryman, 2004). Even taking into account these considerations this technique was deemed to be effective for the purpose of eliciting children and young people's views. This is because such limitations can be overcome by asking participants to speak one at a time for the sake of clarity and encouraging participants to respect each other's viewpoints regardless of whether they may differ from their own.

### **6.2.3 Child-centred methods**

Child-centred or child-friendly methods (regarded as 'non-traditional methods', i.e. photography and stories) were also used in this study because I wanted to actively engage children in the research process. While interviews are useful for eliciting views of children, they are not the only method that can be utilised to help position children's views at the centre of the research process. Over the past three decades (1990s onwards) there has been a growing impetus from researchers across all social science disciplines to enable children to express their own views and participate in decisions affecting their own lives. This reflects the growing visibility of the children's rights movement upon the political agenda. Most significantly, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which clearly set out the global recognition of children's rights to protection, provision and participation. In addition, a growing body of research has examined the ways in which children are competent 'social actors' who actively contribute to, and influence their own lives (Hood *et al*, 1996; Solberg, 1996; Smith and Barker, 2000; Punch, 2001).

This research has contributed to a re-theorising of childhood, encompassed by the term 'the new social studies of childhood' which recognises that childhood and children's own social relationships are worthy of investigation in their own right (Barker *et al*, 2003). Both the children's rights agenda and the new social studies of childhood have helped to reposition children's voices at the centre of the research

process. This in turn has led to new ways of engaging with children characterised by mutuality and ‘negotiation not imposition’ (Hill *et al*, 1996).

The development of child-centred research methods has been one key way of addressing the issues of power relations in research, because through child-led interviews, drawing, photography and stories children have the opportunity to reflect their thoughts and feelings through a medium that is enjoyable or familiar to them. In contrast, traditional methods (e.g. questionnaire surveys) can often appear intimidating (since they require a high degree of literacy), inappropriate (since they are often devoid of any context) or boring (since they might be construed as ‘no fun’) to children (Barker *et al*, 2003). However, Barker *et al* (2003) asserts that it does depend on the survey in question because this method can allow child friendly communication to some extent. Even so, it is widely acknowledged that qualitative methods are regarded as more effective in enabling children to communicate on their own terms (Pink, 2001).

The diverse range of innovative research methods that are used in research with children have been examined and critiqued by numerous researchers (Mauthner, 1997; Punch, 2001; Pole, 2007; Cook and Hess, 2007). On the basis of these findings I decided to utilise the methods of photography and short stories. I felt they were the most appropriate for my study, given their apparent popularity with children across all age groups, but also because they do not require prolonged involvement from the researcher. In addition, these methods were well received in the planning stage by the participants with whom I have had prolonged involvement. The section below discusses these approaches further:

#### **6.2.3.1 Photography**

Photography is an increasingly popular research method with children (although it is not a ‘new method’ (see Worth and Adair, 1972) because disposable or instant cameras are very simple to use. They also allow children to explore and record their own experiences, feelings and sense of place(s) (Mauthner, 1997). Moreover, because cameras do not require the presence of researchers when photographs are taken there



are no spatial or temporal restrictions on children's participation in the project (Barker *et al*, 2003).

However, despite being advantageous from an empowerment perspective there are limitations to this method. For example, participants may take photos of other children or adults where informed consent has not been gained (Alderson, 2000; Punch, 2001). Additionally, it is difficult for a researcher to assess where the photographs might have been taken or why (Pole, 2004). It is important to emphasise that these limitations can be overcome if they are acknowledged in the research process. First, where photos have been taken of individuals where informed consent has not been gained, the researcher can either ask for consent or decide not to use the photographs publicly. Second, researchers can ask children to discuss and explain their photographs, essentially provide a context. This is beneficial because as Einarsdottir (2005) describes, 'when the children take photographs that are later looked at and discussed in interviews, the data gathering is in part in the hands of the children, and they provide evidence of their own rather than being directed by adults' (p527).

Further, an adult's interpretation of a photo could be completely different from the child's. This was outlined in Barker *et al*'s (2003) study where a photograph of a bus shelter covered in graffiti prompted a different interpretation from the researcher as opposed to the young person who had taken the photograph.

### **6.2.3.2 Stories**

Stories also allow children to share their experiences, although through a written medium, rather than a visual one. Writing is seen as a legitimate and everyday form of communication and so it is not a method that is 'alien' to children. This was emphasised by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2005): 'Writing can be a powerful way to help children and young people reflect on a topic and express their ideas, thoughts and feelings' (p56). Free writing also gives participants the opportunity to move outside the researcher's understanding of the topic and can be a useful method when participants feel

uncomfortable talking about an issue. As well as free writing based on children's experiences, diaries can be used to record specific events, enabling better accuracy than may be provided by simply asking children to remember details of everyday activities (Mair and Kierans, 2007).

However, this approach also has limitations. First, stories or diary writing can be quite time consuming and may have to be completed outside the research setting, requiring a strong commitment from the participants. There are also concerns that the agenda of the researcher may influence the stories told. Thus, while providing guidance is useful for both the child and the researcher it should not detrimentally impact the child's own ideas (Lewis and Lindsay, 2000). In addition, the researcher needs to consider the age of the child, and adapt the task accordingly.

The above methods, as demonstrated, have both strengths and weaknesses but irrespective of their limitations I felt they were applicable to my study because in their different ways they provide a platform for participants' views and experiences, which is why they were all ultimately included. The next section discusses the design of the different research instruments.

First, I discuss the design of the interview schedule for both the individual interviews and the focus group. Second, I make reference to the design of the child-centred methods: photos and stories.

## **6.3 Research design:**

### **6.3.1 Interview schedule**

In preparing a semi-structured interview schedule I was aware that interviewers need to consider prompts and probes; according to Cohen *et al* (2000) prompts enable the interviewer to clarify topics or questions whilst probes enable the interviewer to ask respondents to extend, clarify or qualify their response. Therefore, because I was designing an interview schedule for adults, children and young people, the interview schedules had to reflect this. However, given that the questions explored in all the

interview schedules were broadly similar, it was not such an issue. The interview schedules centred, for the most part, on the following five topic areas (which reflected the research-questions):

- Motivations for home education
- Nature of home education (i.e. daily routine/social interests)
- Benefits/disadvantages of home education
- Society reaction/media perception to home education
- Future of home education

Nonetheless, there were two exceptions. First, only the young person's interview schedule asked for outcomes regarding formal or other qualifications and future aspirations; the reason being relatively self-explanatory. Second, only adults and young people were asked for their views of LA involvement with regards to home education and the Badman Review (2009) because it was felt that children would have little knowledge or insight into these issues.

An example of one question contained in all three interview schedules is highlighted below (interview schedule is provided in Appendix 3 and 4):

Selected interview item on social interests

What social activities/groups do you engage in?

**Prompt:** Are you involved with these activities or groups on a regular basis?

**Probe:** Could you say more about what you gain from being part of a group or taking part in these activities?

### **6.3.2 Photography**

This task was designed in a way that was accessible to the children and the researcher; while I wanted the task to be fun I was also aware that a focal point was necessary if the photos collected were going to be of use for this study. I therefore provided written guidance to the children and their parents about the purpose of the task and what it involved (see Appendix 4). I asked the children to compile a photo collage using their own or a borrowed digital camera (either together or separately – given that some of the children had siblings) about their home education experience and include written descriptions about what the photos represented. I explained that it could include photos of the following:

- Home education environment (house/garden/pets)
- Daily routine (Do you use certain items every day – a desk/chair? or a computer?)
- Social activities (e.g. swimming/horse riding)
- Places/events visited in the UK and abroad (e.g. museums/parks)

I purposely asked the children to design a photo collage with written descriptions because literature on this area suggests that using words to frame meaning is important. For example, Barthes (1981) famously argued:

The meaning of an image does not become apparent until it is accompanied and explicated by text. Pictures are ambiguous, and their interpretation is dependent on words to specify and focus their multiple and uncertain meanings. (p105)

However, this was not the only reason I asked children to provide written descriptions alongside their photographs; I also felt that it would provide a useful basis when I interviewed children about their experiences (see Clark and Moss, 2001, 2005).

### **6.3.3 Stories**

I designed this task in a similar way to the photography activity, because while I wanted to draw out children's subjective experiences I thought it would be useful to

provide some written guidance. For example, I asked the children to write a short story (either hand written or typed) prior to being interviewed about what it is like to be taught at home and to consider the following points:

- What activities or subjects you enjoy (e.g. swimming/history)
- The items/resources that you use in home education (e.g. books/internet)
- Days out that you feel were useful to your learning (e.g. museums/parks/holidays)
- Who you learn with

In the written guidance I also stressed that the length of the story was solely dependent on the child and that a picture could be included if it would help them to describe their experience of home education. This was to ensure that the child had ownership of the story but also to avoid putting off a child who might not like writing.

## **6.4 Piloting**

To further ensure that the design of the research instruments was appropriate and accessible to the research participants, I decided to conduct a pilot study. According to Punch (2005) it is an essential stage in the design process because it can provide information on the length of questions and features that respondents may find difficult or ambiguous. The participants who took part in the pilot study comprised two home educating parents (both female) and four children (two female and two male, aged from 9 to 15) all of whom were members of the local environmental group that I had been actively involved with for eight months prior to piloting.

The individuals chosen, therefore, represented the target population as far as possible and also the age range of participants (although I recognise that young people aged between 16 and 25 years were not represented). It is also necessary to mention that the children commented on the interview schedules for both the children and the young people because, as I have mentioned previously, they are broadly similar, with the

exception of one topic area (qualifications/future aspirations). The pilot provided useful information in several areas and prompted the following amendments.

## **6.4.1 Interview schedule**

### **6.4.1.1 Adults' (parents') views:**

**'Nature of home education'** – In this section respondents felt that one of the questions could be rephrased to account for individual learning approaches. For example, rather than asking 'Are you autonomous or structured in your approach to home education?' It could be amended to 'What approach do you use?'.

**'Society reaction/media perception'** – When asked questions about societal and media perceptions respondents thought it would be useful to include a question about immediate family or friends' views of home education. Generally family and friends are the first to be made aware of the decision and so it would help to provide additional context about the family and their experiences.

### **6.4.1.2 Children and young people's views:**

**'Nature of home education'** – The respondents mentioned that a question could be included in the interview schedule that asked about the subjects that children and young people enjoy rather than solely focusing on their daily routine or the resources they use. They thought it would be interesting for the participants and may provide information that could be used in the other questions.

**'Benefits/disadvantages of home education'** – The youngest respondent (aged 9) was unsure what was meant by the term 'learning environment' that formed part of a question in this section. I therefore decided to avoid including this phrase in the children's interview schedule to avoid confusion.

### **6.4.2 Photo activity**

In terms of the written guidance provided for the photo activity, the respondents were very positive. They found it gave clear direction due to the inclusion of four bullet points but was not too specific that it could impede enjoyment or creativity. However, a problem was raised regarding the time frame for the activity which dictated that only recent photos could be included. The respondents mentioned that some children might like to include photos in their collage from family holidays or day trips that they had been on. To be honest, I had not considered the impact of the time frame on this task but on talking to the respondents I realised it made sense. After all, how could I get an accurate representation of children's experience of home education if I was only focusing on one period (i.e. a month) in time? I therefore decided to leave the decision-making process with the children.

### **6.4.3 Stories**

The comments provided about the written guidance for personal stories on EHE were also favourable. Again, this was because of the clear and relative openness of the bullet points. The choice to draw a picture was also regarded as beneficial because it allowed participants to supplement the points made. There were no comments made for improvement in relation to this task.

The piloting phase of the research proved invaluable because it outlined key areas that I needed to amend or change for the benefit of the main phase of the study.

## **6.5 Sampling**

### **6.5.1 Selecting the sample**

The respondents who were asked to participate in this study were UK-based home educating/educated parents, children and young people because these were the three key areas that were under investigation. In terms of the age range of participants, I did not want to narrow the focus too much as I was aware that access was problematic. This is why for the research with children I decided that 7 to 15 would be a good age range as it encompasses fairly young children and older children's views. Similarly, with the young people, the age range was quite broad, 16 to 25 years, because I wanted to ascertain the views and experiences of a cross section of individuals, some of whom may be still home educated, others may be in employment or in higher or further education.

In regards to the gender of the children and young people participating in the study, again I wanted to be as inclusive as possible; both male and female individuals would be approached. However, in terms of the parents sampled, I decided to focus solely on the parent that was the most involved in home educating (which was usually the mother) as they would have greater awareness and knowledge about their routine and thus could offer a personal insight into their daily experiences.

### **6.5.2 Approaching the sample**

Thomas (2011) outlines

Because you not able to generalise from one case, there is no point in thinking about all of the sampling techniques that are used with other kinds of research. The only sense in which 'sampling' is relevant in a case study is the sense in which you go out and find the subject of your case study. (p3)

I decided to use a variety of approaches to contact the sample because of the nature of the population and also the different age range of participants. The EHE groups that I was involved with were a useful starting point because some of the parents and children had shown an interest in participating. The internet was also a significant resource because it allowed me to email a brief synopsis of my research to regional



and national home education groups (Mumsnet was also contacted because it had a designated EHE section).

I realised, however, that contacting home educating young people (16 to 25 year olds) through EHE groups would be more difficult because generally parents of younger children are members. Such groups are often a first port of call for newly home educating parents seeking advice or guidance and are used as a tool to arrange meetings with other families. I therefore decided to contact (via email) the Home Education Youth Council which was set up by young people in response to the Badman Review (2009). I also attended (camped for three days) HESFES because not only is it the world's largest gathering of home educating families (now in its 16<sup>th</sup> year) it also has a designated 'teen camp'.

Further, the technique of 'snowballing' was utilised for this research because it allowed me to use the contacts I had made (whether via email or the EHE groups) to gain further contacts to possible participants. Lastly, it is important to mention that more individuals were contacted than was necessary for a project of this scale. This is because every project has to deal with problems relating to non-response (Cohen *et al*, 2000) and I was aware given the topic area this might be higher than average.

### 6.5.3 The sample

The following tables outline the sample participants in detail:

**Table 6.1 Parents/Guardians**

Number	Name	Location	Interview Length	Date	Recruitment
1	Margaret	Home	1:18:26	29/07/2011	EHE forum/website
2	Charlotte	Home	00:43:16	25/08/2011	Through another home educator
3	Paul	Telephone	00:18:50	23/09/2011	Contacted directly via personal blog
4	Joy	Home	00:52:52	07/10/2011	EHE forum/website
5	Grace	Telephone	00:39:50	08/10/2011	EHE forum/website
6	Dawn	Home	00:48:42	21/10/2011	Through another home educator
7	Pippa	Telephone	00:42:11	28/10/2011	EHE forum/website
8	Samantha	Telephone	00:51:32	15/02/2012	Mumsnet
9	Amanda	Home	01:04:57	16/02/2012	EHE forum/website
10	Lynn	Home	00:42:28	21/02/2012	Member of EHE group I attended
11	Catherine	Art gallery	00:38:24	02/03/2012	Member of EHE group I attended
12	Natasha	Home	01:20:24	07/03/2012	Through another home educator
13	Julie	Church hall	00:25:13	04/04/2012	Through another home educator
14	Kate	Church hall	00:20:19	04/04/2012	Through another home educator
15	Mia	University	00:40:22	07/04/2012	Through another home educator

**Table 6.2 Case Study Participants – Children**

Interview Type	Number	Name	Age	Location	Interview Length	Date	Recruitment
Semi-structured	1	Jack	9	Art Gallery	18:27	02/03/2012	EHE group
	2	Jennifer	12	Home	22:13	07/03/2012	Through another home educator
Focus group	3	Amie	7	Home	20:58	11/02/2012	EHE group
	4	Ben	9				
	5	Katie	12	Home	28:59	21/02/2012	EHE group
	6	Sophie	15				
	7	Mike	11	Home	26:32	08/03/2012	EHE group
	8	Emma	13				

**Table 6.3 Gender and Age Breakdown - Children**

Gender	Age	Number of Family's
Boys (3)	7-9 year olds (2) 10-12 year olds (1)	5
Girls (5)	7-9 year olds (1) 10-12 year olds (2)	
	13-15 year olds (2)	

**Table 6.4 Individual Interviews – Young people**

Number	Name	Age	Location	Interview Length	Date	Recruitment
1	Riley	21	HESFES	00:27:34	24/07/2011	Directly
2	Geoff	18	HESFES	00:51:35	24/07/2011	Directly
3	Cameron	17	HESFES	00:16:19	25/07/2011	Directly
4	Sarah	16	HESFES	00:20:39	25/07/2011	Directly
5	Finley	19	HESFES	00:15:35	25/07/2011	Directly
6	Nathan	17	HESFES	00:20:37	26/07/2011	Directly
7	Lauren	18	HESFES	00:33:24	26/07/2011	Directly
8	Luke	16	HESFES	00:19:06	26/07/2011	Directly
9	Rhianna	18	Home	00:14:58	29/07/2011	EHE forum/website
10	Carly	18	Telephone	00:12:10	23/09/2011	Contacted parent via personal blog
11	Hannah	17	Home	00:20:12	07/10/2011	EHE forum/website
12	Richie	20		00:22:10		
13	Aaron	16	Telephone	00:18:22	28/10/2011	EHE forum/website
14	Issac	20	University	00:19:15	07/04/2012	Through another home educator
15	Jamie	17		00:28:06		
16	Edward	18	University	00:27:20	24/04/12	Through another home educator
17	Siobhan	21	Telephone	00:18:24	18/05/12	Contacted me via email

**Table 6.5 Focus Groups – Young People**

No. Focus Group	Number	Name	Age	Location	Interview Length	Date	Recruitment		
1	1	Connor	21	HESFES	00:40:55	24/07/2011	Directly		
	2	Peter	20						
	3	Patrick	18						
	4	Mary	19						
	5	Caroline	19						
2	6	Liam	18	HESFES	00:22:46	25/07/2011	Directly		
	7	Archie	17						
	8	Lucas	16						
3	9	Olly	17	HESFES	00:46:05	26/07/2011	Directly		
	10	Tom	18						
	11	George	18						
	12	Max	16						
4	13	Carrie	25	Home	01:16:52	25/08/2011	Through another home educator		
	14	Scarlet	23						
	15	Leanne	19						
	16	Clare	17						
5	17	Becki	23	Church Hall	00:32:12	04/04/2012	Through another home educator		
	18	Jacob	21						
	19	Alana	18						
	20	Scott	20						
6	21	Jessica	19	Church Hall	00:35:08			04/04/2012	Through another home educator
	22	Jack	17						
	23	Henry	16						
	24	Adam	17						

**Table 6.6 Gender and Age Breakdown - Young People**

Gender	Total number of participants	Age
Male	26	(12) 16-17 year olds
		(11) 18-20 year olds
		(3) 21-24 year olds
Female	15	(3) 16-17 year olds
		(8) 18-20 year olds
		(3) 21-24 year olds
		(1) 25+ year old
Total	41	(15) 16-17 year olds
		(19) 18-20 year olds
		(6) 21-24 year olds
		(1) 25+ year old

## **6.6 Ethical considerations**

Taking into account ethical considerations when conducting a research study is a necessity because the potential for research to cause harm is recognised by the existence of ethical codes, guidelines (national, departmental or organisational), protocols, institutional review boards and consent forms. In particular, the British Educational Research Association (BERA) has published guidelines and protocols for researchers. Guideline 6 states that ‘all educational research should be conducted with an ethic of respect for the person, knowledge, democratic values, the quality of educational research and academic freedom’ (p5).

In addition to the key principles that underpin BERA’s (2004) ethical guidelines, are the further guidelines that state researchers should be guided by their ‘responsibilities to participants’ which includes issues of consent and confidentiality.

The BERA (2004) guidelines specifically emphasise the importance of obtaining valid and informed consent from children and young people. This echoes Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (1989). Article 3 requires that in all actions concerning children the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration. Article 12 requires that children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity.

I therefore tried to ensure that the methods employed to gain access, obtain the voluntary informed consent and confidentiality of home educating participants were ethically acceptable. The section below highlights this in detail:

### **6.6.1 Consent**

To obtain voluntary informed consent I explained to respondents (either via email, phone or face to face) the aims and purpose of my study; that I was an objective researcher (with no personal or professional affiliation to home education); what I hoped to achieve; and the likely form of publication (of which a copy would be distributed to each respondent upon completion). In addition, when obtaining consent

from children I asked both the child and their parents for permission. I wanted the child to be an active part of the research process and I was also aware that on occasions parents may agree to the child's participation without directly consulting the child (see Alderson, 2000). However, in the context of this study, given that I had developed a relationship with all but one of the children prior to data collection (as members of the EHE groups I was involved in), it was not thought to be an issue. I also made clear at the start of the interviews (or task-based activities) that the respondents could choose to withdraw from the research for 'any or no reasons, and at any time' (BERA, 2004, p6).

Lastly, I asked permission from participants to use a tape recorder during the study (when conducting oral interviews, individual or focus groups). This was in order to gain a more thorough example of what was been said during the discussion. Again, when researching children I asked for permission from parents and the child.

### **6.6.2 Confidentiality**

To ensure confidentiality, I made clear to all respondents that what was discussed in the interview or focus group would remain confidential because pseudonyms would be used throughout the research process from transcribing to the write up. However, I was aware that with focus groups the information respondents share is no longer private because the very nature of a focus group involves sharing information (which may be sensitive). I established ground rules from the outset and asked participants to respect each other's privacy. I also stated that the tape recordings would be kept in a safe place (i.e. on a computer which only I had access to). This is perhaps why all of the participants who participated in oral interviews were happy to be recorded and gave a considerable length of time to the interviews (the oral interviews lasted between 19 and 120 minutes).

In addition, there were issues regarding confidentiality that were applicable to the task-based activities (stories and photo task); these included references to the child, whether written or visual. I therefore asked the children to avoid including their name on their short story (although mentioning their age was fine), and if photos were

included of the children, I asked for their permission (as well as their parents') to use the photos – or to photoshop them to ensure anonymity if that was preferred.

### **6.6.3 Problems encountered**

The research study, however, was not without complications. This echoes the fact that research is neither neutral nor innocent practice: each research choice and situation generates its own ethical questions and issues that demand their own unique answers (Guillemin and Gillam 2004). This has also been emphasised by other researchers:

We like to think, as researchers, that we are in control of sampling and research design, but matters are often taken out of our hands. (Robson, 2002, p64)

We often lack clear guidelines for designing and pursuing field research that would indicate the kind of problems associated with gaining access, sustaining it and exiting gracefully. (Cicourel, 2003, p361)

The difficulties I encountered centred on the following three areas:

- Negotiating access to participants
- Trust and risk
- Data collection: Location and methods

#### **6.6.3.1 Access**

Similar to other home education researchers who are 'outside' of this field (Lees, 2011, although Lees presented herself as an 'ally' of EHE, p114-117), I experienced resistance and at times antagonistic comments about my research and its intentions. In particular questions centred upon why I was researching this topic when I was not home educated, and whether I was pro- or anti-EHE. Two examples from two home educating mothers who were contacted via a home education forum provide an insight into some of the comments encountered:

#### **Example One**

Jeanette, I'm afraid that, if you haven't read – at the very least – John Taylor Gatto's 'Weapons of Mass Instruction', I can't really be answering personal questions.



## **Example Two**

Don't be entirely put off by the fact that home educators are extremely wary of people wishing to conduct research. There has been a great deal of 'stuff' flying about this past year or two, most of it negative and much of it invidious.

Another particularly unpleasant experience involved a telephone conversation with a home educating mother of two grown-up children. The respondent had emailed after I sent out an email request to a home education group asking for young people's participation. From the outset I realised this was going to be a difficult and uncomfortable conversation.

The home educating parent seemed completely opposed to the fact that part of my research was investigating the outcomes of home educating young people. She asked: 'How could I possibly measure outcomes?' I again reiterated that this was not the intention of my research, I was merely collecting data to inform parents and the public about what happens to young people engaged in this provision. I mentioned that from my experience of researching home education many home educating parents are interested in the qualifications or career prospects of home educated young people. Although she recognised this, it did not stop her from being dismissive of my research. In addition, she felt that I 'would find it difficult to make contact with other home educators'. This was despite explaining on a number of occasions that I had made considerable efforts to integrate myself into the community.

It is important to mention, however, that opposition to my research, which comprised negative and hurtful comments, only included a small number of home educators, many of whom have polarised views about the nature of education and schooling. This also supports the view of Badman (2009):

I have to say, Chairman, I have been somewhat surprised by the reaction of a vociferous minority – and I do think it is a vociferous minority; I can actually count the number of people who have done it. I have found the remarks of some of them offensive. (Select Committee Evidence, Monday, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2009)

Therefore, the ‘outsider’ dimension, although important, did not impede the progression of this research. Despite an assumption from some of the participants (primarily parents) that being an outsider would impact the research process, in actuality much meaningful information was shared. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) argue that this raises questions about the dichotomy of insider versus outsider status, because holding membership in a group does not denote complete sameness within that group. Likewise, not being a member of a group does not denote complete difference. A researcher’s identity is not only based on the kinds of relationships that the researcher develops in the field but also on the kinds of shared structural characteristics that may include age, sex, class and occupation.

I certainly found, for example, that being a young female was advantageous in the context of researching home education: I was essentially perceived as ‘unthreatening’ to parents, young people and children. With regards to parents I found that they were generally put at ease by my willingness to listen to their experiences, to reflect upon my own school experience and to provide information about the research I had read when it was requested or of interest. For young people and children, there was a notable realisation that I was ‘similar to them’ in terms of my dress or the language I used. For example, one child commented on the jewellery I wore: ‘You have a really pretty necklace’. In addition, a participant at the home education festival (HESFES) mentioned that he stopped to talk to me when approached because he was interested in who I was and what I wanted. He did not think I was a researcher initially because we shared some obvious similarities. We were both camping at the festival and were not too dissimilar in age. This is why I support the view held by Kanuha (2000), who emphasised that the

tidy categories in qualitative research rarely hold ... It is important to embrace broader ways of knowing and ways of being to understand peoples, cultures, and practices so different from and increasingly so similar to who we are.  
(p445-446)

After all, qualitative researchers are not separate from the study with limited contact with participants, but are firmly rooted in all aspects of the research process and essential to it. This was further echoed by Dwyer and Buckle (2009): ‘Just as our

personhood affects the analysis, so, too, the analysis affects our personhood. Within this circle of impact is the space between, with the costs and benefits this status affords. (p61).

#### **6.6.3.2 Trust and risk**

Gaining trust (as mentioned) was an important part of this research study because it helped to yield useful data. However, a consequence of establishing relationships with participants posed problems with regard to my professional ‘researcher’ identity that I had not envisaged at the outset of this study. For example, on one occasion in the Netherlands, a home educating mother asked if I could take her two children (aged 4 and 5) to the park on their bikes while she cooked dinner for us all. This was obviously a complement because she did not regard me as a ‘stranger’. However, I was not particularly comfortable assuming this role; not only because I did not know the area that well, but also because of the responsibility it entailed. Regardless of this, I decided to respect the mother’s wishes and take the children to the park.

I realise that the experience I encountered as a result of establishing trust was not only pertinent to my study. Other researchers, such as Pole (2007), have encountered similar situations. During Pole’s (2007) research study a parent (mother) asked a researcher to take care of her daughter and a friend while she spent time with another child in a changing room. Pole (2007) mentions that, ‘placing researchers in a position of being responsible for the safety of a child was not an issue we had expected to confront’ (p78).

In addition to this, I also found it difficult to know when and how to ‘leave the field’ because of the relationships and confidences I had built up, particularly at the local EHE groups. I was aware that once data is collected a researcher should start to withdraw but this is not as easy as it may first appear. Over a year I was very much part of the groups where memories were shared and experiences were gained, both on my behalf and theirs. For example, during my time with the environmental group I learnt that walking up a hill was not as arduous as it sounds! (Prior to this I did not even own a pair of walking boots or a waterproof jacket.) Similarly, Yee and Andrews (2006) discuss the difficulty of leaving a research field once rapport has been

established: ‘Having sat in the front rooms and kitchens of our host families, how did we disengage from the field?’ (p408).

Nevertheless, I had to leave the field at some point so I decided that the best approach would be to thank the groups for their contribution (even if some of the members could not contribute because of time constraints). I also informed the parents and the children who participated that I would be in touch once the PhD was completed to feedback the results in person (or via email if necessary).

The next section discusses the problems encountered with regards to data collection in a home and festival setting.

#### **6.6.4 Data collection:**

##### **6.6.4.1 Home setting**

When the research encounter is changed from an institutional setting (e.g. a school or university) to a more private and personal setting (e.g. a home) it can pose unexpected ethical, emotional and methodological issues for a researcher for which there can be little preparation. (Yee and Andrews, 2006, p397)

I certainly found this to be true on occasions in my study, because although I tried as far as possible to follow ethical guidelines which state that confidentiality and privacy of the research participant should be upheld, at times it was comprised in the location of a home setting. For example, there were times when I was unable to control who was present because other siblings or parents were often within earshot of conversations. I recognised, however, that because I was a ‘guest’ in their home I had to respect the family’s wishes. This is why I was mindful not to reprimand children for talking or singing loudly even though at times it made part of the interviews untranscribable.

Further, the diversity of family life also meant that I had to respond to situations as and when they arose. For example, on one occasion a home educating young person who I had anticipated interviewing was ill in bed (although I interviewed her younger

sister). Additionally, a home educating family who I had contacted a year previously and whom had agreed to take part had moved house. I therefore thought it best to wait until they had settled in before resuming contact. Thus, there were certain challenges posed by researching in a home setting, but it is also important to mention that there were numerous advantages.

Firstly, I was able to obtain information into family networks, their learning practices and resources used. For example, two of the girls (siblings) who participated in the task-based activities enjoyed showing me their art work over lunch. Second, participants commented that the research raised their awareness of various issues. In particular parents' revealed that they enjoyed talking about or listening to their children's experiences of home education because such issues were rarely confronted or reflected upon in their busy daily lives.

#### **6.6.4.2 Festival environment**

There were also problems that were specific to another main research environment where data was collected: a home educating festival (HESFES). I have already stated that the reason for choosing this location was because it offered access to large numbers of home educating young people who are notoriously difficult to access. Even so, despite its advantages it also posed problems.

First, in the designated 'teen camp' which accommodated young people up to the age of 21, males seemed to be more accessible than females: males tended to congregate outside their tents, whereas females tended to stay inside the tents. Consequently, I found it easier to approach males rather than females regarding participation as I did not want to intrude on the personal space of females by entering their tents without permission. However, on approaching some individuals (which required considerable confidence given that I was a lone researcher among a group) I realised that either some of the young people were not the correct age for this study (younger than 16) or had never actually been home educated (HESFES, I found out, was not solely for home educating families).

Nevertheless, despite the problems mentioned, camping at the festival over a three-day period proved to be immensely valuable, both for data collection and the research generally, as when I wasn't collecting data I participated, watched or listened in to some of the workshops that were on offer (ranging from tie die activities to a children's talent show). I therefore gained a greater awareness about home education from talking to and being engaged in activities than if I just 'visited' the site when I wanted to collect data. In addition, I also got the impression from participants that they valued the fact I was camping and sharing similar experiences to them.

Thus, as I have mentioned, collecting data was not easy in the context of home education, particularly with regards to researching in the home and festival setting (data was also collected in other locations – see sampling tables). However, location was not the only problem experienced as there were also problems evident during the conduct of the interviews (face to face or telephone) and the task-based activities.

## **6.6.5 Conducting interviews:**

### **6.6.5.1 Individual interviews**

The use of a tape recorder was disconcerting to respondents on occasions because of the numerous glances directed towards the recorder. This supports the view of Cohen *et al* (2000) who explain that a tape recorder can be seen as 'threatening' or 'alarming' given that personal thoughts and views are being preserved. Interestingly, the worried glances directed towards the recorder tended to be from the individuals with whom I had built the closest relationships. I think that the reason for this (although I could be mistaken) was because they did not view me primarily as a 'researcher'.

Nevertheless, once I had again informed the participants that they would not be identified in the study and what was said would be entirely confidential (as far as the research setting permitted) they appeared to relax and forget that they were being recorded. This seems to support Bryman's (2001) assumption that 'if people do agree to be interviewed they usually do so in a co-operative way and loosen up after the initial anxiety about the microphone' (p322-323).

In addition, there were also problems specific to researching children. For example, one child proceeded to pick up the recorder and ask how the recorder could be stopped or paused during the interview. When I asked whether they wanted me to stop the interview they categorically assured me that they did not; they were just interested in the 'new gadget'.

#### **6.6.5.2 Focus groups**

Similarly, in the focus group interviews reference to the tape recorder was mentioned, but again once the discussion was in full flow it ceased to be of importance. The most significant problem I encountered with focus groups was trying to ensure that all the participants had a chance to speak. I have mentioned previously that one of the limitations of focus groups is that some individuals tend to dominate discussion. I tried to minimise this by asking some of the participants who were not speaking as much for their views, but naturally some people did talk more than others. Also, I found it difficult at times when some of the participants proceeded to speak over one another or tried to shout to get their point across (given the occasional background noise at HESFES). Again, I informed the participants that everyone must have an opportunity to have a say so there should be no shouting or interrupting each other.

In retrospect, it probably would have been better if there were fewer participants in some of the focus groups (i.e. five as a maximum number) to make it more manageable. However, as I have already highlighted, this is not always possible and certainly in my research context I found that young people were more receptive to being interviewed in a group if their peers or siblings were present. Regardless of the limitations mentioned, fairly elaborated accounts were obtained.

#### **6.6.5.3 Phone interviews**

The number of phone interviews that were conducted was small because this method was primarily used for participants who lived in a different area to the researcher (although on occasions I did travel to participants in different localities).

Nevertheless, it is still necessary to mention the problems evident with this technique. This centred on my inability to recognise verbal cues (Holbrook *et al*, 2003) which

meant it was difficult to discern if a participant was uneasy about a question or had any additional worries about the study. When I did feel that a participant was holding back or unclear about a question, I felt comfortable enough to address it. This was because the phone interviews were conducted with individuals I had already had contact with, either in person or over the phone, prior to the interview being conducted.

#### **6.6.5.4 Stories**

The main limitation evident with the story task was that two of the children (one 9 year old and one 12 year old) expressed a dislike of writing. Once I explained to the children that the story could be as long or as short as they wished (typed or hand written) and pictures could be included, they seemed happy. Also, I was made aware by the children's parents that the children associated writing with 'school work' (both children had attended school for a short period), as writing tasks were not normally part of their home education routine. Having said that, given the diversity of the sample population I think the reaction to the task on the whole was positive. This was substantiated by the fact that all of the children who were asked to complete the task did so and when I collected the stories from the children they delighted in sharing them with me.

#### **6.6.5.5 Photo collage**

Similarly, the photo activity evoked a positive reaction among the children and for some it was probably favoured above the story task. The children seemed very keen to take photos to show me and the 'world' (as one nine year old put it) what home education was like from their perspective. The only disadvantage of this task concerned the inclusion of images of the children in the photo collage.

I had explained prior to the task that if children were included in the photos, permission would be sought from both the parent and the child. I also made clear that photos could be edited in order for anonymity to be preserved. One child (7 year old) in particular did not understand why this had to happen and was under the impression that this meant the photos would be 'ruined'. When I explained that only the face would be covered if requested and people would still see the activities that home



educated children got up to she seemed fine with it. It is also necessary to mention that the parent of this child was happy for both of her children (son also took part) to appear in the PhD whether their anonymity was preserved or not. The parent had a public home education blog where photos of her and the children were regularly uploaded.

The lack of concern regarding anonymity was also echoed by home educating parents more generally. I did not get the impression from any of the parents whose children took part that anonymity was a major issue. Again, I think this related to the fact that the parents trusted me to utilise the photos in a respectful fashion and that their children were happy to be included.

The next section discusses the processes used to analyse the data and why they were regarded as the most suitable for the study under investigation. The first section describes the preparation of the data for analysis and why this is important. The second section outlines how the data was analysed and interpreted.

## **6.7 The analysis**

### **6.7.1 Data preparation**

The first step of data analysis, according to researchers (see Guba and Lincoln, 1994, 2000), is data preparation. This is why I made sure at the design stage of this study that the methods used would simplify as much as possible the actual process of analysis and were tenable in terms of ensuring that the data collected would be analysable (see design section).

As mentioned previously, my study used a range of methods which included interviews, stories and photographs. However, despite their differences, all of the methods reflected the research questions. The interview questions were grouped by topic and a pre-designed cover sheet was provided for the child-centred research which focused on key areas. This was to avoid the possibility of research questions

not being answered and to help limit the time taken to analyse the data, because the themes for the most part would be evident.

The research methods, therefore, were centred for the most part on the following six topic areas (although there were variations depending on the methods used, see Chapter 5):

- Motivations for home education
- Nature of home education (i.e. daily routine/social interests)
- Benefits/disadvantages of home education
- Society reaction/media perception to home education
- Future of home education
- Outcomes of home education

### **6.7.2 Sorting, transferring and transcribing the data**

It is important to mention, however, that despite prior preparation, analysing the data was a time consuming and lengthy process because for the most part (with the exception of photographs) oral or written dialogue was the main form of data collection. This meant that rich and/or lengthy data was elicited which had to be analysed.

In order to ‘keep track’ of the data collected and to aid the process of analysis I decided to store all of the data on my computer. I focused first on transferring all of the child-centred data (stories/photos) into separate word documents because I thought it was the easiest one to start with, given the small number of participants involved (nine). Writing up the hand-written stories was a fairly simple and uncomplicated task as it merely involved copying the children’s stories word for word. Even so, I made sure that the formatting used was the same or as close as possible to the children’s version, because on occasions, key words or examples were highlighted in bold or italics to add emphasis to particular points. For example, in

Sophie's (age 15) story, italics were used when referring to the different activities she pursued in Cadets (*gliding, field-craft, drill* – see annotated story extract, Appendix 9).

With regards to transferring the photo collages onto my computer, a similar process was adopted, although the technique used was slightly different. I took photos of the collages and written descriptions using my own digital camera. The collages were very detailed with at least two covering more than one A4 or A3 page: one was a short book and another collage made use of fax paper to present a timeline of activities. A visual representation of the collages was thought necessary so that further descriptions could be added, and to facilitate the grouping of photos by theme. Four themes were listed on the cover sheet prior to the task and the photos were grouped accordingly ('home education environment', 'daily routine', 'social activities' and 'places/events visited').

Of all the methods utilised, interviews (semi-structured and focus groups) were by far the most time consuming to analyse (amounted to weeks of work) because interviews were the main method employed and they can also pose problems with regards to analysis. Background noise for example, can interfere with the quality of the data. Fortunately in my case background noise or interference was limited but I made sure that once I had transcribed all of the interviews (into separate word documents) I listened to them again. This is because during initial transcriptions things can be missed because of 'mishearing, fatigue or carelessness' (p313, Bryman, 2001). I also added nuances of talk such as laughing and used dashes for pauses on rehearing the tapes to allow for the data to be analysed more efficiently.

### **6.7.3 Analysis of data**

Following the initial sorting, categorising and transcribing of the data I then proceeded to analyse the data. Again, given that I had used multiple methods analysing the data was not an easy task. Having said this, the fact that my methods (interviews, photos, stories) were grouped according to the research questions (see design section) did help aid analysis. First, I decided to look at the photo collages because it made up a small part of my data collection. The guidance available on how

to conduct photo analysis in the social sciences is limited because it is not a tool that is widely used (see Pink, 2001). Moreover, in my study photos were used as part of a 'photo elicitation' technique or to prompt discussion when I conducted interviews with the children. As a result the photos collected were a source of visual and social data, which is outlined further by Atkinson (2005):

There are many social phenomena that can and should be analysed in terms of their appearance and performance that may be captured in visual terms. These are not however, separable from the social settings in which such phenomena are generated and interpreted. They should not be explored purely as 'visual' topics, but as integral to a wide range of ethnographic projects. (p27)

The 'photo elicitation' interview with the children was, therefore, important because it helped 'decode' the images. Although written descriptions were added alongside the photos which helped to assign meaning, within the interview itself the children were able to choose their favourite photographs and give detailed and reflective explanations. For example, Sophie spoke at great length about the picture of herself and her sister wearing Tudor costumes at a stately home (see Appendix 8 for examples of the photos collected). This included the activities they took part in and the different skills she gained from volunteering. This led to a further discussion about the benefits of volunteering and how she feels part of her wider community because she is engaged in a wide variety of different volunteering projects. A comprehensive picture of Sophie's appreciation for volunteering on a personal and community level thus became evident as a result of discussing a single photo.

With regards to analysing the 'photo elicitation' interviews, the process employed was similar to the techniques used to analyse 'standard' interviews. The oral data was transcribed and key words and themes highlighted. More specifically, the 'constant comparative method' (see Miles and Huberman, 1994; Thomas, 2009) was adopted in order that I could compare each phrase, sentence or paragraph to find correlations or themes that captured or summarised the content of the data (e.g. daily routine – '*I decide what I want to learn*' (autonomy)). This technique was also utilised with the other textual data compiled by the participants (interviews and stories).

Broadly, using the ‘constant comparative method’ helped to identify the key themes contained within the textual data/transcripts in order to gain a clearer understanding of particular points of interest/importance. As I did this, I carried out a preliminary coding of the data, labelling the various themes that I identified. These were highlighted in bold or italics on the various word documents.

The general process is shown below in Tables 6.7 and 6.8. In many cases themes were identified by recurring key words (e.g. word frequency) or in specific illustrative examples provided by the respondents. The tables below provide an example of one of the topic areas that respondents were asked about in the interviews (Benefits of EHE) and the themes that emerged from the data.

**Table 6.7: Textual Data (key words) – Benefits of EHE**

Themes	Key words
‘Life skills’	Big issue for Sophie and Emma (see stories). Interviewees: Parents, p 20, 22, 34, 38, 46. Interviewees: Children/young people: p12-18
‘Flexibility’	Stories – see, Jennifer/Jack/Sophie Interviewees: Parents, p 20, 21, 27, 28, 30 Interviewees: Children/young people: p 5-13

**Table 6.8: Textual Data (illustrative examples) – Benefits of EHE**

Themes	Quotes
<u>Life skills</u>	
Motivation	<i>‘I’m convinced that <b>motivation</b>, that ability to achieve comes from the fact that when you are at home there is only you and you have to do it ... I think the fact that you have to stand on your own two feet ...’ (Margaret, grandparent)</i>

### **Confidence**

*'... I definitely think that home education had an effect in increasing my **confidence** and making me proactive and interested in a variety of things ...'* (Carly, young person)

### **Practical skills**

*'My family went back to New Zealand for a month in January. We stayed with our old neighbours. Twice when we were there they took us fishing. On the second time **I caught a fish and they taught me how to gut it.** That was a very cool day.'* (Sophie, child – story extract)

### **Flexibility**

#### **No time pressure**

*'There is an advantage to the flexible hours as well. **You don't have to get everything done within the school hours.** You can keep going longer or get it done quicker, or do it at a particular time. I get up quite late but then I can work into the night ...'* (Nathan, young person)

#### **Pursue interests**

*'I like that you can work in your own time and you can choose which subjects you can do first and you don't have to do it in a set order or a set time. **You can follow what you are interested in** because you would only get the weekends if you were in school.'* (Emma, child)

After the preliminary coding of the data, therefore, the key themes, both minor and major in relevance, became apparent across all the textual transcripts (see Appendix 6 for an example of a themed and annotated interview transcript). I then decided to incorporate all of the textual transcripts (interviews/stories) into one word document to ascertain whether any of the themes were related to each other and could comprise a range of sub-themes (Appendix 7 provides an overview of how this was done, specifically relating to one key area: benefits of EHE). This technique is formally known as 'Network Analysis' (see Thomas, 2010) because to all intents and purposes the researcher is identifying networks – correlations, contradictions or paradoxes evident in the data.

Figure 6.1 below is a case in point because it highlights how from one key theme (Benefits of EHE – identified by the research question) other sub-themes emerged. Take the theme ‘life skills’ for example, participants spoke about how EHE had improved or facilitated certain ‘life’ or ‘real world’ skills either directly or indirectly. For example, home educated children and young people spoke about learning to bake or how they had grown in confidence due to interacting with a wide variety of people.

**Figure 6.1 Benefits of EHE**

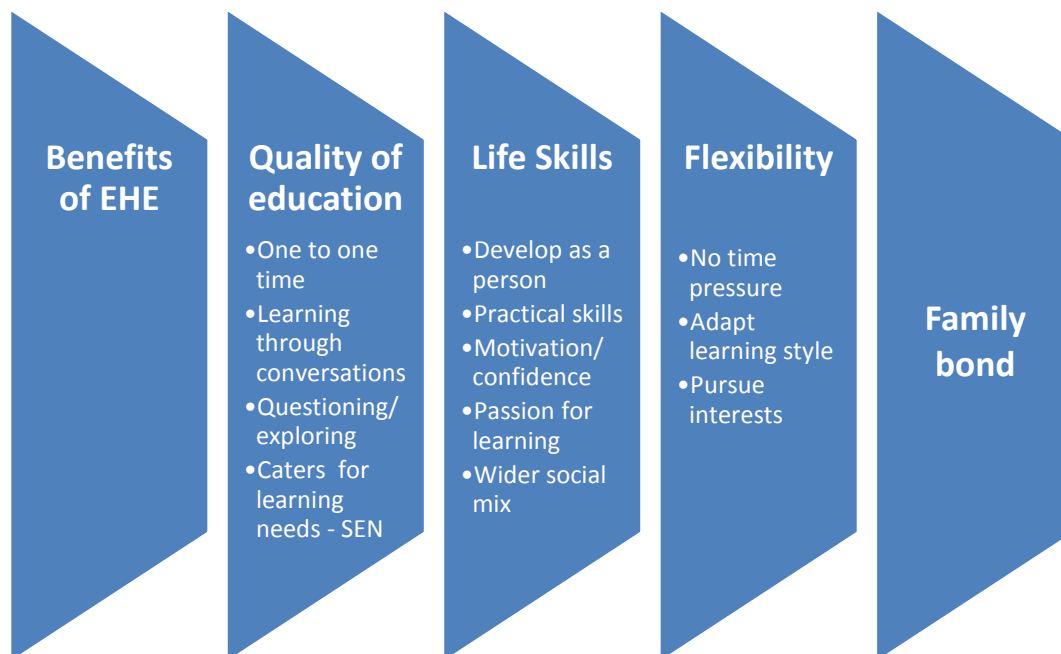
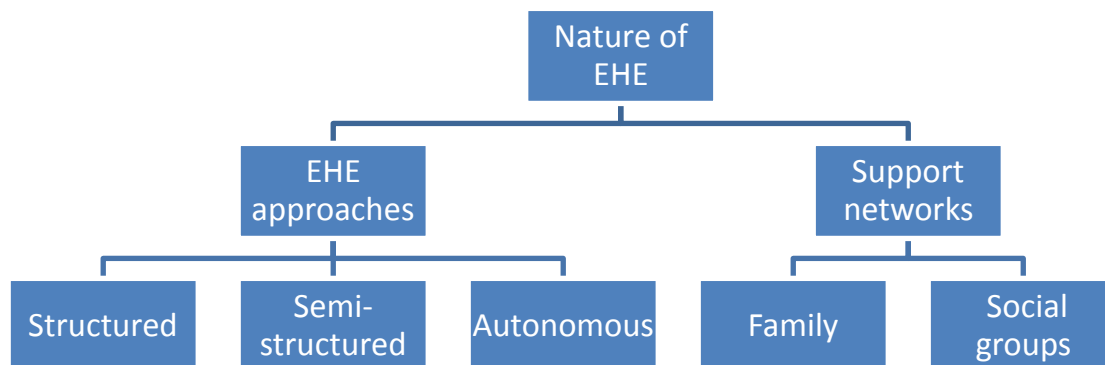


Figure 6.2 below provides another illustrative example of how themes and sub-themes emerged from the textual transcripts. This diagram examines the nature/practice of EHE (see RQ 2).

**Figure 6.2 Nature of EHE**



Network Analysis was useful because it was simplistic and effective and allowed for the identification and interrelation of key themes in the data. It also helped me to develop a framework for analysis rather than get lost in the maze of data that at times was overwhelming. Although, as I have mentioned, the fact that the methods used, whether stories or interviews, were grouped according to the six research questions (i.e. reasons for EHE/outcomes of EHE) did help ease the analysis process. This is because most of my time and attention was spent rereading the transcripts and identifying themes that corresponded to the initial research questions, as evident in Figures 6.1 and 6.2.

I believe, therefore, that I came to know the data through the techniques mentioned and this allowed me to draw out illustrative quotes that corresponded to the various themes or sub-themes. In short, key quotes were selected that were deemed to be the most poignant or representative of the research findings. For example, if participants held strong views on a particular issue, then three quotes from three different people would be included to represent the sample population (parents, children and young people). Similarly, where respondents held a minority view, a quote which summarised their argument would also be included and an explanation provided. Additionally, given the diverse sample population I thought it necessary to adopt an inclusive approach to data presentation where possible. I wanted to ensure that children and young people's views were not side-lined in favour of adults' views.



Making systematic checks of this kind was useful because they helped to ensure that all participants' views were given an equal chance and avoided over-reliance on a person or a group of people who were particularly articulate or had a lot to say on a topic.

I recognise, however, that there are a wide range of well-known data analysis programmes on the market such as NVivo and Atlas.ti that are targeted at social scientists for the purpose of aiding analysis. I decided not to use these programmes because I was more than satisfied with the quality of analysis obtained through the techniques adopted (constant comparative method and network analysis). After all, as Thomas (2010) outlines: 'There's no substitute for a good set of highlighters from W.H.Smith, a pen and paper, and a brain' (p207).

#### **6.7.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has described the development of the research instruments; outlined how ethical considerations informed the study; made reference to the problems that were encountered throughout the research process; and defined the analytical methods used to make 'sense' of the data. Overall, the methods used were considered to suit the research questions as rich open data was elicited from both the interviews and the task-based activities.

The next chapter presents the findings of the research.

## Section five

### The results

# **7 Chapter 7: Reasons**

## **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the motivations for EHE, with parents, children and young people's views being discussed. As mentioned previously (literature review) the reasons for EHE is one area that has been researched quite extensively by researchers in comparison with other areas (see Rothermel, 2002, 2004; DfES, 2007; Morton, 2010). However, the research has tended to focus on adults' motivations which have meant that the views of children and young people have been sidelined. This is why all respondents were asked for their opinions regarding reasons for EHE with children and young people being specifically asked about their role in the decision-making process.

The reasons for EHE provided by parents, children and young people are listed below in order of importance:

- Dissatisfaction with the school environment/system
- Older children/siblings were EHE
- Lifestyle/religion
- Other reasons (e.g. school phobia/separation anxiety)

## **7.2 Dissatisfaction with the school environment/system**

The main reason why respondents considered EHE related to problems with the school environment/system or both. This included bullying, SEN/gifted and talented provision and the inadequacies of the National Curriculum. It is important to emphasise, therefore, that in many cases parents' decision to EHE was not due to an ideological-based opposition to schools or schooling but the failure of schools to provide what they felt was a 'suitable' and 'efficient' education in a safe and supportive environment. Interestingly, none of the respondents mentioned safety or security fears in schools as a reason for EHE but this could reflect the fact that this study focused on the UK context as opposed to the US where addressing safety and

security issues are high on the agenda. Such concerns relate to a number of events: (a) the deaths and destruction at Columbine High School on April 20<sup>th</sup> 1999; (b) the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001; (c) the slayings at the Amish School in West Nickel Mine, Pennsylvania on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2006 (Hanna, 2011); and more recently, the killing of 20 children and six adult staff members by a lone gunman at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Newtown, Connecticut (The Guardian, 2012).

### 7.2.1 Bullying

Bullying, either by teachers or peers was cited as a significant motivation for EHE. In many cases children and young people suffered physical symptoms as a result of being bullied. No reference was made to cyber-bullying by any of the respondents despite media reports indicating that this type of bullying has grown over recent years (e.g. The Guardian, 2011). However, this could be attributed to the nature of the sample as none of the child participants were on social networking sites. Moreover, the majority of the young people sampled would arguably have being too young to join such sites prior to being withdrawn from school (the minimum age for Facebook registration is 13).

The following extracts highlight the bullying encountered by teachers and peers and its implications:

Aaron went to private school from the age of 5 to 12. He wasn't happy at the upper school because there was this particular teacher who took a dislike to him and basically bullied him a bit and he ended up having stomach aches and depression. So I had no other option but to take him out of school. (**Pippa, parent**)

Richie was getting bullied by some lads in his class and I said could he be moved away from them; 'Can he be moved out of this class?' The answer was 'No'... I did keep saying I think his work is suffering. Finally we saw a different teacher who pulled out all his stuff and said: 'Oh dear, his grades have dropped significantly' and I was really angry because I had been asking and asking and they kept saying 'no'. (**Joy, parent**)

The main reason I came out in Year 8 was due to bullying that I had from my class mates ... There was physical and verbal ... In class I would be hit and stuff in front of the teacher and the teacher would have a little go at them but

wouldn't do much ... I had one friend in school but he was pretty much suffering as much as me ... (**Finley, young person**)

Literature on this area also indicates that bullying is a major reason for EHE. Fortune-Wood (2005) conducted a study with 263 UK families and the main reason cited was bullying, with two children in the sample considering suicide as a result of bullying. This in turn prompted their parents to withdraw them from school. For example: 'Following a suicide attempt and repeated bullying I was advised by a police liaison officer to withdraw him and start teaching him from home' (p28).

Bullying was also noted as a significant issue in Rothermel's (2003) UK study (419 EHE families; 1099 children) as bullying accounted for 25% of families' motivations for EHE, with 24% referring to child depression and stress. However, it is important to mention that not all children withdrawn from school in my study were the 'victims' of bullying. In some cases they were the perpetrator as the extract below summarises (although it was the exception – mentioned by two young people):

I went to an all-girls secondary school and it caused me to become quite bitchy and I used to bully some kids. I wasn't learning and I spent most of the time socialising rather than learning ... I was home educated for about a year and then I went back to school in Year 9. I had anger issues and my mum thought the school would control it and when that didn't work and I kept getting into fights she decided that home education was for the best. (**Sarah, young person**)

In this instance bullying of other children prompted the decision to EHE. The young person felt this was the best decision given the circumstances and her inability to concentrate and learn in school.

### **7.2.2 SEN**

The failure of schools to support or provide suitable and effective provision for SEN was another contentious issue and motivator for EHE. In all of the groups sampled (parents, children and young people) SEN was raised. The most common condition mentioned was dyslexia (including wide spectrum dyslexia), with dyspraxia coming second. None of the children or young people had a physical disability. The three

extracts below echo the difficulties encountered by respondents with regard to provision and support:

I have been home educated for eight years this year. I have problems with my short-term memory so I'm more of a kinaesthetic learner ... I couldn't work with 30 kids. **(Emma, child)**

I was home schooled for five years. I went to a private school for 6 years and came out when I was eleven. I came out because they had very high expectations in the school and I was dyslexic. I just started to lose all sense of worth in my life and became a bit suicidal so I was taken out immediately. **(Jacob, young person)**

We had worked so hard to get Becki statemented to find out what on earth was wrong. I had gone to everyone. The problem she had with the dyslexia was that she had no short-term memory which means you are not going to learn very well ... her foundations were like sand. Instead of the school addressing it they were ending up doing the same thing year in and year out and how many years are you going to keep doing it? Even now doctors can't put a label on what is wrong with her, they just say it is wide spectrum dyslexia. **(Kate, parent)**

The frustration noted by respondents, for the most part centred upon a lack of support or indeed acknowledgement of the problems they or their child were facing. This also seems to substantiate other research findings. For example, Parsons and Lewis's (2009) UK study with 27 parents of EHE SEN children revealed that two-thirds of the parents identified 'push' factors away from school as the main reason for EHE. Therefore, rather than EHE being a planned lifestyle choice from the beginning, they felt they had little choice but to withdraw their child from school due to bad experiences with formal provision (37%) and the perceived failure of schools to meet their child's needs adequately (30%). This was highlighted poignantly by one respondent:

The number of HE families in the UK is growing rapidly as many are literally forced into it by bullying in the schools that the school system can't/won't protect their children from, and/or by the failure of the schools to decently address special needs ... We are not choosing home education as an alternative lifestyle choice, but have been left with no other acceptable option. (p14)

Similarly, Fortune-Wood's (2006) questionnaire survey with EHE SEN parents revealed that motivations focused on school failure both in terms of understanding SEN and failure to meet the SEN. Fortune-Wood (2006) emphasised that parents repeatedly reported that their children suffered stress, or in extreme cases mental and/or physical deterioration, as a result of their experiences at school. Moreover, in many cases the stress placed upon parents as a result of these circumstances were exacerbated because many parents reported that they were ignored by teaching staff when they attempted to explain the difficulties their children faced. This was summarised by one parent: '[the] School and LEA refused to listen to any of the problems I raised and insisted he was fine despite a letter from his GP in support' (p74).

However, the problems faced by parents in terms of recognition or support of SEN were not solely focused on conditions which impeded a child's academic development or progress. Reference was also made to the lack of support for gifted and talented children. It is necessary to mention though that none of the respondents used the term 'gifted and talented' but it was nonetheless implied. As the following extracts indicate:

I said to my teacher that I was finding the work too easy and she said it was because the other children were at different levels to me. She couldn't really do anything about it though because everyone has to follow the same curriculum. I was quite bored to be honest. (**Jennifer, child**)

I didn't enjoy school because I was reading at a much higher level than what was expected. I think I went through the entire library in the reception year in six months. I was reading several years higher than my peers and I got put up a couple of years I think in *maths* and English but it wasn't hard enough. So I just started refusing to go because I didn't enjoy it. (**Issac, young person**)

The literature on this area (albeit limited) also seems to confirm my findings that gifted children are EHE predominately because of dissatisfaction with mainstream schooling. Winstanely's study (2009) is a case in point as it is the largest study in the UK to focus on gifted and talented home educated children (27). The study found that parents were dissatisfied by schools' failure to accommodate and cater for their child's specific needs in terms of challenge, socialisation (i.e. interacting with others

who have similar interests), testing, assessment and curriculum. In addition, some parents felt that they were ignored when concerns were raised about their child's education because teachers were either unable or unwilling to recognise their child's ability. Thus, parents of gifted children opted for EHE because they felt they had no other choice due to the inflexible structure of the school/curriculum and limitations of teacher practice.

The next section outlines in more detail responses made regarding the National Curriculum, because in my study it was also noted as a particular area of concern.

### **7.2.3 The National Curriculum**

The main limitation expressed by respondents in relation to the National Curriculum was its restrictiveness or its 'one size fits all' approach. In particular, respondents argued that the National Curriculum was unsuitable for individual needs because it did not accommodate specific learning styles and stifled questioning/creativity. The following extracts highlight the main arguments cited:

I was home educated for four years from the age of 12 to 16. The reason was I felt that I had kind of reached a glass ceiling with school. I wasn't been allowed to develop in a way that was suitable for me. I was the slowest child in the class and sometimes I would be slow but then I would catch up with the others. I would grow in spurts. (**Edward, young person**)

If you have got a 2 or 3 year old they will constantly come up to you and say: 'Where does the rain come from?'; 'Why can't I put my hand in the fire?' When children ask those questions before they go to school you answer them without thinking and if you don't know the answer you will find out and then tell them. Children never stop doing that and if you just keep on answering them then they get an education ... In school though there is no time to think *let alone* answer questions is there?' (**Margaret, grandparent**)

I love art; it is one of my favourite subjects because it is all about your imagination. In school we hardly ever did art which upset me. I'm not sure why ... Since I have been home educated I have entered and won lots of competitions using my art. (**Jack, child**)

The extracts reveal that the National Curriculum was seen to impede children and young people's enjoyment of learning which in many cases led to parents withdrawing their children from school. This echoes previous research on motivations



which suggests that home educated families are dissatisfied with a 'system' that promotes conformity above individuality. Jackson's (2007) study with three home educated young people (one female – 15 and two males – 10, 17) in Australia is a case in point. Robert (17) mentioned that one negative aspect of schooling was its universal approach to learning which did not take into account all learners' aptitudes and abilities: 'You're restricted to the pace of the class so if they don't understand it but you do, you're just ... meditating for ages while the rest of the class catches up. Also vice versa ...' (p12).

Further, the inability of children and young people to express or develop their creative capabilities through the Curriculum was also mentioned as a limitation by respondents in my study. This was similarly supported by Holt (1964) who argues that schooling kills curiosity and renders children 'stupid'. As the following quote highlights:

To a very great degree school is a place where children learn to be stupid. A dismal thought but hard to escape ... Children come to school curious; within a few years most of that curiosity is dead, or at least silent ... one consequence of the drive for so-called higher standards in schools is that children are too busy to think. (p156)

The drive for higher educational standards was regarded by Holt (1964) as impacting negatively upon creative enrichment. Research conducted by Sherman (1997) with 50 children from five reception classrooms in order to assess: 'Why they go to school' and 'Who makes us go to school', also revealed that from a very early age opinions are formed about the benefits of academic pursuits as opposed to creative ones. In terms of 'why they go to school' Sherman (1997) outlines that the children's responses focused on schooling as being necessary for their future success and that their attendance was cardinal in their development. In contrast, creative pursuits such as play was regarded as being separate from school because it was something they could 'choose' to do rather than being 'forced' to do. As one interview extract highlighted:

R: 'Are playing and working different?  
C: Yeh.  
R: How are they different?

C: Playing is choosing to be playing in the office (a play area called the office) or sand or Lego ...  
R: Right, and what's working?  
C: Working is you be good when you work.' (p121)

Sherman (1997) mentions that the obligation to attend school held particular resonance with the children because it underlined its importance. It also impacted upon the children's perceptions of 'play' because when asked if learning could take place during play activities most children responded negatively. For example:

R: 'What kind of things can you learn at the sand table?  
C: Nothing.  
R: What about the water table?  
C: Splashing. (laughing)  
R: What about when you play in the house?  
C: That's not working, that's playing.' (p122)

Thus, for children, playing was associated with fun, whereas work included any activity assigned by the teacher, mostly using pencil and paper. It was something that 'you had to do' it was not dependent on 'free choice'.

As summarised, dissatisfaction with the school environment/system was a significant reason for EHE and this was also reflected in the literature. Nonetheless, this reason was not only pertinent in its own right, as in my study it also impacted upon the second cited reason: 'older children/siblings being EHE'.

### **7.3 Older children/siblings were EHE**

For the most part respondents mentioned that their older siblings/children (and in one case mother) were EHE because of dissatisfaction with the school environment/system. The following extracts summarise some of the comments made:

Both my older brothers went to school and were bullied in various forms. So my parents decided to take him out of school and then not long after they decided to take my other brother out of school. (**Connor, young person**)

My parents never forced me to go to school. One day they just said: ‘Do you want to go to school?’ and I was like ‘Nah’. My older sister I think went to school for one day and didn’t like it’ (**Patrick, young person**)

Their mum (my daughter) died when they were very young. She had to come out of school at 14 (in 1986) due to quite a serious illness and the school wasn’t accommodating at all. They weren’t flexible ... One of my granddaughters was really unhappy at school so my daughter, before she passed, decided to take her out. She would have been coming up to 10. I mean my personal view is it’s some kind of agoraphobia; she still doesn’t cope well with crowds and I think it was being in a room with 30 people. (**Margaret, grandparent**).

Nevertheless, despite the majority of families in my study citing dissatisfaction with the school environment/system as a primary motivation (which subsequently meant younger children/siblings were withdrawn), there were also a small number of families who decided to EHE because it was their intention from the beginning.

## **7.4 Religion/life choice**

Three of the families sampled decided to home educate because of lifestyle, religious reasons or both. There was no reference made by any of the respondents to ‘cultural reasons’. This is unsurprising given that it is most often cited as a reason among Traveller groups (see Bhopal and Myers, 2009; Derrington and Kendall, 2008).

The following extracts summarise the comments made regarding religion and lifestyle:

The other reason, aside from I knew I wanted to do it, was religious. I didn’t want them going through the school system because I am a practising Christian. (**Samantha, parent**)

My husband and I used to communicate a lot by letter at the start of our relationship because he lived in London. One of the things that came up in our letters was that we were both quite keen to home educate although I can’t remember how I ever found out about it because I was only 20 at the time ... We just knew we both wanted to home educate before we had the kids ... (**Lynn, parent**)

Similarly, Rothermel's study (2003) also found that a minority of respondents (13%) were motivated by morality and faith which is in stark contrast to the US where religion is still a major reason for EHE. A recent study conducted by Smith-Field and Williams (2009) with Black African American families is a case in point. It found that six families (out of a possible 21) shared a belief that God had actually led them to home schooling, as one parent summarised: 'After attending a home school exposition at the invitation of a friend I prayed about it and the Lord definitely said I brought you home to do this' (p379).

In addition, 15 families described home schooling as a complement and support to their religious beliefs. This led Smith-Field and Williams (2009) to conclude that the 'role of religion in home-schooling in the US is still a prominent factor' (p379).

The last reason cited by respondents in my study centred upon school phobia and separation anxiety.

## **7.5 School phobia/separation anxiety**

The issue of school phobia has been documented in previous research studies and reports (Hanna, 2011; NCES, 2003) and was similarly reflected in my study, with a small number of young people reporting adverse physical symptoms as a consequence of the school environment. The extract below highlights the comments made:

On and off I spent two and a bit years of primary school and four or something years of secondary school. So I went in, out, in, out ... I came out of primary because it was completely stressing me out and I had no idea what I was doing there and I sort of got nervous habits like chewing my clothing to shreds ... I think it was just visible that I was psychologically disturbed by the school experience. I couldn't sleep properly. I had all those sorts of signs that someone is mentally distressed. (**Lauren, young person**)

Interestingly, however, separation anxiety from parents rarely features in literature on EHE. This could be because it is not regarded as a major motivation, which similarly supports my findings as only two families mentioned it. Nevertheless, where it was mentioned it was noted as being the catalyst for EHE.

The reasons why I came out was because I missed my mum ... Before school I was really happy just with you ... **(Jack, child)**

Jennifer has always had problems with issues of separation from me and every transition has been traumatic. She never settled at nursery and hated nursery and going into reception and then to year one to year two ... The second day she was sick up the gates ... Education has always been traumatic ... **(Natasha, parent)**

Thus, it could be argued from these responses that the children were effectively withdrawn from school because of issues relating to child/parent attachment. Research has suggested that secure relationships (particularly parent-child bonds) are important, if not imperative for healthy child development (i.e. cognitive, behavioural and social-emotional outcomes, see Bowlby, 1969, 1973). Nonetheless, too much parental involvement (whereby a parent restricts the freedoms of their child for personal gain) can also impact the development of a child. In the two cases mentioned, however, there was certainly no evidence to suggest that EHE was enforced on the children. In fact in both cases the children were clear that it was their decision to be home educated.

A discussion about who has the right to educate is summarised below because it reveals further the rational underpinning the decision to EHE and why home educators/educatees argue in favour of this right.

## **7.6 Right to home educate**

Home educating/educated parents and young people argued in favour of a parent's right to home educate as emphasised below:

It is a parent's right that is a natural-law-based human right. Ontologically it is the parent's right to educate their children. The state can't have that right because they don't know the children. **(Joy, parent)**

The teachers shouldn't parent a child the parent should do that. The parent knows what is right and what is wrong for their child academically and otherwise. So it should be up to the parent to decide. **(Peter, young person)**

It's the child's right, and it's very hard to say that a 5-year-old child should have that complete right to make that decision but ultimately I believe it

should be the child's decision and the parent's interpretation of that decision. So that parents are the ones who sort it out because the child ultimately knows a hell of a lot more what makes them feel encouraged to learn than anyone else. (**Geoff, young person**)

Therefore, respondents were of the opinion that parents had the right to decide what was best for their child educationally. In particular, they argued that unlike the state they are aware of the child's triumphs and failures and have a vested interest in ensuring the healthy development of their child beyond state-targeted milestones at 11, 16 and 18. These responses also echo those provided to the DCSF Public Consultation (2010), which focused on the registration and monitoring proposals as outlined in the Badman Review (2009).

Out of a possible 4,833 home educators that replied to the question on the role of the state in EHE, 4,497 disagreed that there should be a role for the state in ensuring that the quality of home education was adequate, or that children had a right to education that had to be considered independently of their parents' preferences. The reasons provided for adopting such a stance centred upon parental responsibility. They believed that it was their responsibility to raise their children and to ensure that they receive a suitable education. Moreover, they did not accept that there could ever be a conflict between the rights and interests of parents and children. In addition, 750 respondents said that the proposals were 'draconian and represented serious infringements with their civil liberties and family privacy' (p8).

Similarly, Conroy (2010) argued that the registration and monitoring proposals outlined in the Badman Review (2009) were not proportionate because the family still remains the 'locus for the primary engagement with the developing child' (p340). Therefore, if the state intervenes in EHE it must make certain presumptions in favour of the parent with respect to the child's academic, moral or social education. Moreover, this approach would also help to ensure that government responses to home education are seen to be political rather than populist and controlling which is what happened with the advent and publication of the Badman Review (2009) (Conroy, 2010).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that in my study there were occasions where the right to EHE was for the ‘good’ of the family rather than focused on the child per se. The following extracts from a teenage daughter and her mother illustrate this point:

I was 8 when I got taken out of school. It was purely a matter that my three older siblings had been taken out; they all have dyslexia. It would have been really inconvenient having me stay at school ... I loved primary school but at the same time I wanted to help my other siblings, particularly my eldest sister who was really struggling ... **(Alana, young person)**

Really our focus was Becki and trying to sort her out and the family knew that any sacrifice they might make in the home schooling sphere was to help Becki. She had no socialising skills and yet she was one of siblings ... She would cling to my skirt at the age of eleven which is not what an average eleven year old would do. We would bend over backwards to help her to cope. We have just been looking all the time to help her. **(Kate, parent)**

It could be argued, therefore, that in some cases a child did not have a ‘choice’ to be EHE but rather the decision was made for them by their parents. However, it is necessary to mention that although the second cited reason for EHE in my study related to ‘older children/siblings who had been or were currently EHE’ this did not mean to say that respondents were EHE against their will. In fact, arguably the reverse was true: they understood and were involved in the decisions taken. For example, in the case of Alana mentioned above, she was just as committed as her mother in helping her sister overcome her problems and in no way felt that EHE was ‘forced’ upon her without consideration. For Alana it was as much her choice as her mother’s and when she decided to re-enter school at 13, again the choice was hers. This similarly supports the views of other young people in my study, such as Jessica:

We have known families where the child at 11 or 14 has decided that home education does not work for them and have gone back into school. So we have had people like that, so the child is in control. **(Jessica, young person)**

Even so, for those children who have never attended school the element of ‘choice’ is limited in the sense that exposure to one part of that ‘choice’ (i.e. school) has not been made, subsequently the decision to EHE cannot be an informed one. While

participants in my study to an extent acknowledge this, they also felt that this argument could be levelled at school children, as one parent highlighted:

Some people say that children who are home educated don't have a choice and they should have the choice to go to school. Well actually it is the other way round because the children that go to school don't get the choice! (**Julie, parent**)

As is in evidence, the reasons for EHE were as diverse as they were interesting. It is not surprising then that the question concerning the right to EHE provoked a wide range of debates among respondents. However, what was apparent from the responses (of parents and young people) was that the right to provide an education should remain with parents. This is because parents were regarded to be the best judge of their child's educational capabilities and as such they should have the ability to exercise their right to educate their child how and in what way they believe appropriate. Despite the consensus of opinion being in favour of this right, the respondents recognised that a child's right to education should take precedence over their right to educate, as one parent summarised:

I think it is difficult. I think everybody should have the right to home educate their children but I think the right of the child to be educated comes before the right of the parent to educate. (**Paul, parent**)

The right of the child to be educated certainly underpinned and informed the decision-making process of the parents. I was not aware of any parent who had excluded the child or children from this process. Indeed if anything, the children were at the centre of the decision and the reason why EHE was pursued.

### **7.6.1 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined that EHE is pursued for a wide range of reasons which similarly echoes the diverse characteristics of the families: some of whom are married, cohabiting, single parents or in one case a grandparent taking sole responsibility for EHE (more detail is provided in Appendix 1 about the adult participants). This also substantiates previous research conducted on motivations in the UK and elsewhere which have found that home educating families are not a



homogenous group (see Ray, 2002; Morton, 2010). Thus, stereotypes that characterise home educators and their families as ‘eccentric, arrogant, middle-class and hippy’ are seemingly outdated, unfair and unjust (Rothermel, 2003, p75).

However, one commonality home educators do share is their commitment to exercise their right to EHE. This is not solely for practical reasons as there was a consensus among respondents that EHE had highlighted their educational options. These were found to extend beyond the sphere of schooling or school attendance as a democratic or human right. Thus, parents were aware of their rights and responsibilities in relation to education and were actively pursuing this, with little or no help from the state.

It can be argued, therefore, that EHE is the catalyst for further thought and questioning on behalf of parents (and young people) about the role and function of the state in education and how it affects their place in society and their functioning as citizens. The decision to home educate can subsequently be seen as an ‘awakening’ of sorts, because through this process parents (and young people) are questioning other forms of education and its purpose. Lees (2011) also recently acknowledged how the discovery of EHE is an ‘important life event’ because it ‘opens gates to other ideas’ which include ‘changed perceptions of the politics of society, including a realigned attitude towards the formation of the democratic self’ (p153).

Thus, the motivations for EHE and the rights and responsibilities governing this area are important to understand because they reveal key insights into families who pursue this provision and the extent to which they will fight for their right to educate. This obviously has profound implications for the continuation of EHE presently and in the future. More broadly, it poses questions relating to other alternative forms of education (e.g. free schools) and the level of state involvement that is considered acceptable by parents. It is arguably too early to discuss the impact of free schools (or virtual learning) within the rights and responsibilities discourse and it is also not within the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, the debates raised here will undoubtedly continue to resonate, not only in the context of EHE but with regard to alternative education generally. The next section discusses how EHE is practised.

# **8 Chapter 8: Nature of EHE**

## **8.1 Introduction**

The practices of EHE (how children and young people learn on a day-to-day basis) form the basis of this chapter. Observations, photos and stories (compiled by the children and included in Appendix 8) were found to be particularly insightful for this phase of the research. First, the different approaches to EHE are summarised which includes how families undertake EHE and their decisions for doing this. Second, participation and involvement in EHE groups are explored in order to assess how they develop and why, their level of accessibility and the benefits of being engaged in such groups. Lastly, home educated families' involvement in 'other' groups for educational, social or civic engagement purposes are discussed as it helps to further illuminate the learning opportunities EHE children and young people are engaged in.

## **8.2 EHE approaches**

The EHE approaches utilised by parents and their children were as follows:

- Structured (usually included a planned timetable of activities)
- Semi-structured (part structure/part autonomous)
- Autonomous (largely child directed)

The approaches cited echo existing literature on EHE as other research studies have revealed that families generally identify with one of these approaches (see Rothermel, 2003; Fortune-Wood, 2004; Thomas and Pattison, 2007). Interestingly, however, although structured and autonomous approaches tend to dominate discussions surrounding EHE provision and practice in this study, the semi-structured approach was favoured above all others. This could be related to the fact that only a small minority of this sample had religious or lifestyle reasons for EHE, which are generally associated with either structured or autonomous practices. Nevertheless there were exceptions in my study as families who were not religious or home educating for lifestyle reasons were practising structured or autonomous approaches.

### 8.2.1 Structured

For the most part structured approaches were undertaken (with the exception of one family who were using a US-based Christian curriculum among others) because it either suited the family or in order to pass formal exams (i.e. GCSEs). The extracts below summarises the comments made:

We follow a structure because that is what suits us. Everyone has to be up and dressed, have their breakfast and be ready to work by 9.30am. That is the rule. They mainly follow Susan Wise Bauer's classical curriculum but it's not set in stone. They each have a sheet for the week and the activities are listed for each day. So that is English, maths and science. **(Dawn, parent)**

Initially my mum tried to teach me because my parents had been teachers themselves. That didn't work out because the connection was too close so we ended up getting tutors as I knew I wanted to do exams. I got to choose all the things I wanted to do like Ancient Civilisations and Latin that I couldn't have done in school. I probably did one to three hours a day. **(Edward, young person)**

As is evident, while a 'structured' approach was followed it was fairly fluid, which meant that a timetable could be adapted to suit personal interests or exams. There was only one young person in the sample (Edward, as mentioned above) who was taught solely by a private tutor, but again he felt he had an input in the topics studied and the level of structure that was provided. The level of structure in a home setting was, therefore, not comparable to the level of structure provided in a school setting. Even the family who were using a US Christian curriculum, for example, were not constrained by it. In fact, as with other respondents, only parts of it were utilised as the following extract highlights:

This idea that you can buy a curriculum that suits all your kids, no way! I do some Charlotte Mason with Amie. Ben is almost classical now and my youngest Maddie is turning into the Montessori child. My heart is with Charlotte Mason though because I like what she stood for ... She was a visionary in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. I suppose you could say she was child-focused. I am aware that just because I like her approach doesn't mean I have to inflict it on the kids and Maddie is definitely showing that she wants to be more hands-on and have it in 3D on the table in front of her rather than worksheets. **(Joy, parent)**

The two eldest children (nine and seven) also substantiated this by mentioning that while they were structured, it was also centred round their interests:

We do it when we want to but we always start at 9.00am. We have work to do and we can do it whatever time of the day until it is done ... I do English, reading, maths, religion, Greek and Latin and critical thinking. My favourite maths is '*Life of Fred*' about a little boy who teaches maths and has a talented doll called Kingie. I am learning to play the key board using Aventus Software. It's very good as we learn about composers too. I like cooking and want to be a chef when I'm older ... (**Ben, child**)

I play the key board too ... I love reading and my favourite author is Tomie de Paola. I also like going places and learning about what we have read or seen. We went to the Birmingham Art Gallery to see the Leonardo pictures. He was very good at art and is one of the most famous artists ... I can't remember his last name though [laughter]. Sometimes we go to Think Tank Museum or other places don't we mummy? (**Amie, child**)

My observations with this family over a six-month period (generally on Fridays, with another home educating family) also revealed the wide variety of activities that the children were engaged in. For example, on one visit there was a diagram of a human body on the lounge wall that the children had drawn; on another visit the children were learning about the Tudors and I sat and listened as they answered questions from pre-prepared worksheets. On other visits the children learnt about drawing light and shade. Obviously, it is impossible in a thesis of this size to list all the activities that I observed. Also, given that I only visited the family on Fridays (when it was convenient), I only got a small snap shot of their day-to-day lives (Fridays tended to be history and art days).

However, given that I had built a relationship with this family (and another family who were part of the group) over a number of months, the fact that I visited on a certain day was somewhat irrelevant because I gained just as much from talking to the parents (two mothers) and their children as observing them. In essence, I felt part of the dynamic of the group and this was highlighted when Joy (mother of Ben and Amie) emailed me a link to her personal home education blog which was a written and visual representation of their home education journey and practices. This helped me to understand further the practices that were utilised by the family and how a structured approach helped to complement or facilitate the interests of the children.

For example, Ben really enjoyed science and although I had not witnessed science experiments in practice, after looking through the blog I was able to ask him about this interest and why it fascinated him, as the following exchange highlights:

**Researcher** – What do you like about science?

**Ben** – Science is great, especially when you do things like fossils and exploding things and stuff. It's so interesting ... I like experiments. Last Monday at Cubs we were doing astronomy. We did a rocket launcher thing and there was something in this bottle and then the leader put it upside down and suddenly it went POP and went up [waves his arms in the air to express the impact]. We tried that same experiment at home but the problem is we had the wrong sort of bottle and we didn't know. We had a coke bottle and really you need a fruit shoot bottle.

This extract was revealing as not only was Ben explaining why he was interested in science but also how an experiment he had done at Cubs had gone wrong at home, because they had used the wrong sort of bottle. He was, therefore, rationalising the situation while also helping me to understand how using the wrong type of equipment can impact the result of an experiment. This clear and concise thinking and his infectious approach to learning typified Ben and this exchange certainly brought this to the fore. I remember going home that night and writing in my field notes that this exchange needed to be documented. Not only because it summarised a child's learning process but also because it emphasised just how much children absorb from the activities they are engaged in, particularly when they have the interest and encouragement to pursue them (Appendix 8 provides photographic examples of Ben and his siblings' interests/learning experiences).

As is evident from the interviews and observations, structured home education is one way children learn, but in this study it did not replicate 'school at home' (with the exception of young people revising for GCSEs). Instead, a wide variety of different curricula or approaches were utilised because parents generally adapted them to the child's age or learning style. This was highlighted by Joy who mentioned that Charlotte Mason, Montessori and classical approaches were pursued with her three children.

Table 8.1 below provides an overview of the different educational approaches followed by home educators, particularly those who wanted a more structured approach. It is important to mention, however, that in this study Charlotte Mason and a classical education were favoured above Montessori education practices.

**Table 8.1 Home Education Approaches: Rationale and Objectives**

<b>Charlotte Mason</b>  (see Andreola, 1998)	British Educator (1842–1923)	Living Books: best known of Mason’s methods. Not ‘dumbed down’ and insulting to children.
<b>Montessori (Maria)</b>  (see Montessori, 1965)	Italian physician and educator (1870–1952)	Characterised by an emphasis on independence, freedom within limits.
<b>Classical education</b>  (see Sayers, 1947)	Modern renaissance facilitated by Dorothy Sayers (1893–1957)	Separates children and their learning into three rigid categories: grammar, dialectic and rhetoric.

The diversity of curricula and methods favoured by structured home educators in this study also seems to echo literature on this area.

Parsons and Lewis’s study (2009) with EHE parents of SEN children found that the majority of respondents (63%) barely followed the National Curriculum. However, parents differed in their approach regarding the level of planning of lessons and activities they tended to do. A high level of planning was favoured by a minority (18%) of parents and a very low level of planning was preferred by 30% of the sample, depending on the age of the child. Similarly, in Smith-Fields and Williams’ (2009) study parents discussed the difficulties in balancing the different ages of their

children (over a third of participants had between three and five children) and understanding their children's learning processes. However, the strategies used to try and accommodate age and learning styles included promoting independence among their children and fostering a diverse and fun learning environment that considered a variety of educational approaches and opportunities. This was summarised by one parent:

We try and instil a love of learning and want them to pursue their interests ... My daughter is very visual and very hands-on when it comes to maths. But my son can hear it and he's got it. My little seven year old, he is very good at listening and getting the information ... I will ask him something and he will answer correctly. (p383)

Thus, parents were keen to adapt provision to the specification of their child because they recognised that it would be beneficial in terms of improving learning and increasing excitement.

It is important to mention, however, that structured approaches were favoured in this study by parents with younger children as opposed to older children and this seems to support existing literature on this area. The rationale behind utilising structured approaches was that it allowed parents to cover basic skills such as literacy and numeracy in a way that was accessible and enjoyable. Secondly, parents mentioned that it was 'easier' to follow a structure because they knew what was being covered and also to avoid the 'chaos' that might ensue if their children were left to their own devices.

### **8.2.2 Autonomous education**

Autonomous or 'child directed' learning was also an approach that was utilised by the sample. Similar to structured approaches it was generally favoured by a specific age cohort (in this case, older children and teenagers). I do recognise, however, that there are parents of younger children who autonomously home educate but in this study it was limited. First, respondents definitions of autonomous education are explained, because it helps to identify what practices are associated with this term:

I was autonomous. If I showed an interest in something we pursued it. I don't think I picked up a pencil for two years. I learnt through life really. If I was stacking hay with my mum for example as we live on a farm she would say look at the grid system, so like four high and four deep and work out how many is in it. It was day-to-day maths. **(Scott, young person)**

Autonomous learning is actual learning; your goal is not to prove you're superior, or be superior, it is to learn because you want to. It's because you want to understand so you go and find out. It means you develop the skills to actually know stuff a hell of a lot better and a hell of a lot faster. I probably did three hours of formal learning in 6 years ... **(Geoff, young person)**

The responses indicate that autonomous learning is about following interests or engaging in one's environment and through that skills are learnt or honed. Geoff's comments were particularly interesting because he mentioned that autonomous education was 'actual learning'. It was not about striving to outdo or be superior to others but instead was about developing oneself. This also supports other comments on this area such as those provided below, which highlight that having autonomy in education heightens interests and also allows others to develop.

I am most interested in technology; engineering and computing and all that kind of thing ... Also through following those subjects you can sometimes get diverted. You could look at Medieval Siege equipment from an engineering point of view but then you get interested in the history of it all and then it can side track off. So you are not dealing with: 'You are doing physics; you are doing English; you are doing history or whatever'. It all merges together to what you are interested in ... **(Jamie, young person)**

I was interested in history mainly because of World War Two and World War One ... But although I was technically learning history I was also learning how to research and that combined with geography as I was finding out where the places were. We went to museums to learn more about it. I'm also really interested in ICT and I didn't get any text books on ICT. It was just because my dad was doing it and I was like: 'What are you doing?' That's how I got into ICT. **(Peter, young person)**

The ability to not compartmentalise subjects was valued because, as indicated by the responses, a wide variety of subject areas could be pursued from one initial area of interest. Nevertheless, it is important to mention that although autonomous education was directed in many cases by the child or young person this did not mean to say that parents had no input. For example, two of the girls (13 and 15) who participated in the case study phase of the research (interviews, photos and stories) and defined



themselves as ‘autonomous’ emphasised that while they could pursue their interests, their mother (who was at home) was closely aware of what they were doing as Sophie, the eldest, summarised:

We don’t really have a routine ... We just follow what we are interested in. Mum knows what we are doing though and is happy with it as we discuss it with her. I know I quite like learning by myself but sometimes I like to do things with mum and Katie as well ... I like art, writing and science. I have nearly finished writing a novel ... it is about 31,000 words long. I might try and get it published but I don’t know yet. (**Sophie, child**)

During the course of this research I also had many discussions with Sophie about her EHE experience. In particular, Sophie enjoyed sharing the content of her first Medieval fantasy novel with me. On one occasion when I visited the family and stayed for lunch Sophie animatedly talked me through the plot lines and the different characters involved. She also informed me that to write a novel you need a ‘novel arc’ as it helps with developing plot lines and is also useful if the published book is to be part of a series. I for one, was very impressed with her commitment and dedication to her novel, both in terms of the level of imagination it takes to come up with such ideas and also the fact she gives herself a daily deadline of 1,000 words a day (even as a researcher I struggle with that!). However, her commitment to her novel also meant that she found it difficult to ‘switch off’ at times or to participate in tasks that were unrelated to her novel. This is why she found it useful that her mum on such occasions would intervene. Thus, while her mother gave Sophie and her sister space to pursue their interests she did not want their interests to detrimentally impact their well-being.

The following comment from a mother who home educated all five of her children at one point (they are now in their twenties or thirties) also echoes the difficulties encountered between granting autonomy while also ensuring that their best interests are observed:

I did have the odd panic when one child seemed to be playing computer games 24/7. Although it slowly dawned on me that they are interactive ones; he was playing with a cardiologist, a Buddhist Monk and a Lawyer so he was learning about their professions, their lives and their way of doing things. It was a historically-based game and he went off and read the Iliad because one was set

in ancient Greece and he taught himself a bit of Greek and all this sort of thing ... So although he seemed to be doing nothing but play this game on the computer it did lead to other things and he was actually learning an awful lot ... (**Grace, parent**)

Thomas and Pattison (2007) who conducted a study with 26 parents that educated their children ‘informally’ also found that while parents stressed the desire, or even the need, that learning should be child led they also had firm ideas about what they wanted their children to learn and often worried about whether it was being adequately achieved. Negotiating a suitable balance between parental involvement and that of the child or young person was, therefore, cited as a difficult process on occasions. In my study, however, there was only one respondent who felt that this balance had not been effectively achieved, as this extract outlines:

I was home educated for a couple of years over in Australia and that was really unstructured. My dad was a stay-at-home dad and he took the approach that you could go and watch TV for the whole day if you want. I am doing music at college now but we never even tried that as a subject at home. I think if we had that might have made a difference, like more creative subjects because my dad was always saying: ‘Oh let’s do a science experiment’ or ‘let’s write a story’ or something like that. (**Tom, young person**)

For Tom, EHE was arguably less about his interests and more about his dad’s. Consequently, the definition of autonomous education might not apply to this case. Although this was the definition Tom himself applied to his experience. It is important to mention, however, that Tom did not regret his EHE experience and mentioned that in hindsight all of his experiences might have led him to music. It is something that we will never know but the fact he looks back fondly on his EHE experience might go some way to answering that question.

### **8.2.3 Semi-structured**

The last approach to be discussed is semi-structured which, as mentioned previously, is a combination of structured and autonomous approaches and was favoured by the majority of the sample (irrespective of age). It is necessary to mention, however, that

the majority of families only decided to pursue this approach after experimenting with a more structured approach at the outset of EHE. For example:

... When they first came out of school I did do quite a structured timetable, even blackboards, everything in exercise books ... After the first year I felt quite exhausted and not being able to fit in normal life as well as education so we adjusted our approach ... I think I became more aware of the quality of education on a one to one or one to two and how much they could actually absorb and learn in a much shorter period. **(Charlotte, parent)**

I initially followed the structure that my deceased daughter had put in place. She had put it in place primarily because they were quite young and they needed to sit down at a table and do something. So I started doing what she did and that got reduced to two hours before lunch as I found we could just learn by doing ... We did a lot of learning on the hoof, going somewhere and actually experiencing it rather than sitting and reading a book about it. **(Margaret, grandparent)**

These responses also echo literature on EHE more generally which indicates that parents opt for a structured approach initially because it is familiar and also for the most part they lack confidence in their own ability as educators (see Rothermel, 2004; Thomas and Pattison, 2007). However, as time goes on a semi-structured approach is recognised as being advantageous due to the fact that structured and flexible practices can be incorporated in ways that suit both parents and their child. The following extract provided by a young person further emphasises this point:

The thing I remember when we were really little was going round the shops and having a list of countries to try and find in the supermarket so we got Kiwi from New Zealand and strawberries from Australia and all that sort of thing. Another thing we used to do was maths in the supermarket as mum would ask us to add up 10 items in the basket and whoever gets the closest at the till wins kind of thing. So we would be all frantically adding [laughter] ... We did stuff like that all the time. It was real-life learning and because of that I remembered it. **(Carrie, young person)**

For Carrie, the opportunity to become acquainted with aspects of literacy, numeracy, economics and geography (to name a few) along with her three sisters on shopping trips were useful because everyday subjects were contextualised in a 'real life' environment. This meant that it was 'easier' to remember, develop and apply such

skills which also echoes existing literature on learning processes. One of the most notable studies was conducted by Carraher *et al* (1985) who described how as customers they brought fruit and vegetables from children working part-time on a market stall. The children calculated prices of multiple purchases without error. However, when the same calculations were subsequently set as classroom tasks they made lots of mistakes. This finding has also been supported in other studies (e.g. Saxe, 1991).

The example provided by Carrie although interesting was not exceptional. This is because throughout the research what became clear was that families used a whole host of techniques to relate learning to ‘real-life’ contexts as the following extract by 12-year-old Jennifer highlights:

When I came out of school I had a timetable and tried to stick with it but now we don’t really follow one. When a day comes we just say: ‘Oh shall we do maths? Should we do English? ... We also bring in practical stuff like going places and making things which makes it much more interesting than reading a book on it. I think my brother who is in school definitely misses out. My favourite subjects are probably art and design then maths. (**Jennifer, child**).

The extract provided by Jennifer gives an insight into her EHE experience as it reveals the value she places upon not only being able to choose what to study, but also how to study. This was also reflected in the photo collage that she compiled of her home education experience to date (which was very impressive and measured the length of her kitchen floor), as practically all of the photos depict learning opportunities and their processes, many of which overlap (See Appendix 8).

As is evident in Jennifer’s photos and responses, the breadth of activities engaged in is diverse. This also reflects the experiences of other respondents in the sample. Nonetheless, not all respondents were able to define as succinctly as Jennifer (who is currently EHE) what they did on a day-to-day basis or how in fact they learnt. This could be attributed to the fact that for some respondents EHE was a number of years ago. More generally though, defining EHE was seen as problematic given the broadness of the subjects covered and the activities involved in. The following quote by Rhianna is a case in point:

No, I don't think we followed a particular approach we just sort of learnt! [laughter] ... It was structured in the way like we will start at this time and then we will have lunch. But it was really laid back ... I think it was more practical. Like if we were learning about rivers we would go to the park where there was a river and draw a picture of the river and where all the things would be ... (**Rhianna, young person**)

However, the difficulty of ascertaining how children learn and the activities pursued was not only pertinent to my study as Thomas and Pattison (2007) encountered a similar problem when researching 'informal learning': 'Pinning down informal learning has often felt very much like trying to catch a sunbeam or shut up a shadow in a box; our understanding has often proved to be as elusive as the subject matter itself.' (px)

Even so, despite the difficulties encountered regarding how and why children learn, the above three approaches (structured, autonomous and semi-structured) offer some explanation and insight into the practices pursued by home educated families which, as is evident, differs by family and does not centre primarily on the home. Given this, it is also necessary to mention the support, learning and social networks that are utilised by EHE families on a week-to-week or monthly basis as they also have a part to play in helping to describe the lived experiences of EHE families.

### **8.3 Role of grandparents**

First, the support of family members, particularly grandparents is mentioned because the majority of respondents felt that they played a vital role in offering personal support if they lived nearby (once they had got used to their decision to EHE) and also enhanced the educational opportunities of their children. The following extracts emphasise the points made:

It has been really nice with my parents because they are really involved. They are local so it is nice for the boys to spend time with them because they have got different skills and interests to input ... The boys each have individual time with their grandparents and they really value that. It also helps me as it

gives me a bit more space as home education is full-on at times. (**Amanda, parent**)

I learn mostly with mum but I go to grandma and grandpa's once a week. I love it as I get to do lots of different things like gardening and cooking. I also learn a lot from just talking to my grandparents and sometimes that gives me ideas for stuff to do. (**Jennifer, child**)

The role of grandparents, therefore, in helping with EHE either personally or practically should not be underestimated. This is because it allowed parents to have a break and 'recharge their batteries' and for children the time spent with grandparents was valued because they learnt a lot from talking with their grandparents or engaging in more structured activities. In addition, children felt that they had a closer bond with their grandparents as a result of seeing them frequently, which they felt they would have missed out on if they were in school.

## **8.4 Role of EHE groups**

The role of EHE groups was also important to parents and their children because they similarly provided personal and educational support. For many parents, online national (e.g. Education Otherwise; Then UK) and local EHE groups (e.g. HELM) were the first port of call for EHE information and advice. The advice offered generally centred around legal issues and dealing with LAs. In addition, many parents found virtual support networks established by local groups in their area helpful, primarily because they acted as a point of contact and helped to facilitate communication and extended opportunities to socialise with other families. I recognise, however, that given that such groups were utilised to gain participants for this study I cannot determine that EHE groups are a resource used by all families.

Nevertheless, existing literature does appear to suggest that families value involvement in EHE groups. A recent study conducted by Hanna (2011) in the US with 250 home schooling families revealed that most of the interviewed home schooling families knew of other families and worked together in the delivering of instruction. Some of the most common instances reported were: (a) one parent with a particular expertise instructing a group of children; (b) parents sharing materials; (c)

parents utilising private school facilities (e.g. science labs, computer labs, science equipment) out of hours to instruct a group of students; (d) parents/families sharing resources and materials; (e) local religious groups and churches collating and sharing religiously oriented home schooling materials with families and individuals; (f) curriculum specialists visiting families and tailoring specific home schooling programmes; and (g) parents joining local YMCA facilities for physical education and socialisation opportunities with other home schooling families.

The networking and collaboration of families for educational and social purposes was also echoed in my study as families participated in and founded groups. For example, three parents actually established their own EHE groups in order to increase the educational and social opportunities that their children were exposed to, as the following three extracts indicate:

I am with HELM but I also have my own groups that I run myself. There is one on a Wednesday with the younger ones and about four families are involved in that. And on a Friday we work with another family on history and art. Dawn and I both take turns with that and we always have lunch together which is lovely. (**Joy, parent**)

I don't know if you have heard about our robotics team but for the last seven years I have been running a home education robotics team which has taken part in an international competition that has included going to Japan with it. We do it every fortnight at my house. (**Samantha, parent**)

I organise things at a local library and sometimes they are every week. The group is quite structured, because at the end of the day I want the kids to learn and get something out of it. The Forest School last autumn was every week for 12 weeks and was based mainly outdoors. So you knew you were going and you knew the group you were with ... Generally though we meet once a fortnight. (**Natasha, parent**)

Thus, the groups the parents established varied in terms of size (from one family to 12 families); resources (e.g. use of outside tutors) and location (home or library).

However, one thing the groups all shared was their commitment to fostering learning opportunities whether it was focused on a particular area of study (e.g. robotics and the Forest School) or covered broader areas from history to art. Even so, for the most

part parents who participated in EHE groups shared similar interests even if their approaches differed. The following extracts highlight some of the points made:

There are some heavy duty voices in the British home school community who I actually think need to get down off their high horse for a minute and just leave us all alone and let us get on with it. When you are in a group you don't think about it ... Dawn's approach is different with her children and I don't say to her: 'I'm doing this ... why don't you do that', because her children are different learners to my children. **(Joy, parent)**

We all have different approaches at the EHE group I attend ... I think the organiser had problems with some parents who didn't like the way the workshops were structured ... Some parents have strong views and want to shout about them. **(Lynn, parent)**

These extracts again reinforce the fact that home educators are not a homogenous group (echoed in reasons section). However, as in evidence most home educators were able to put aside their differences for the sake of their children and the wider group. It may also help explain why the majority of parents in this study were shocked by the reaction of other home educators who were either not welcoming or were determined to reinforce their educational philosophies or lifestyle upon them:

There are some families who don't want new members to join. I went along to a particular group when they said they were meeting at a particular place and obviously I got in because they liked me and they liked my son but when I brought another lady along they didn't seem as keen on her. So you can get that. **(Kate, parent)**

There was another group who seemed to be solely vegetarian and were like 'you don't bring sweets for the children' and I was like ok ... **(Julie, parent)**

When we came out we went to a home education group and there was this chap who was really banging schools and really banging the government and I thought it should be just about your children's happiness. **(Catherine, parent)**

Stephens (2001) also revealed that the antipathy directed by some home educators towards others within the community emphasises the different sensibilities of home educators. In particular, conflict centres upon who the 'real' home educators are with autonomous versus structured debates being particularly fiercely fought. In this study, however, only one respondent was fiercely critical of autonomous educators:



I'm a very unpopular figure in some home educating circles because I have my own blog about home education and if you mention my name a lot of them will get apoplectic with rage ... I am widely hated because a lot of them don't actually teach their children, a lot of them have got this thing where a child must decide for himself what he is going to learn ... **(Paul, parent)**

As the extract highlights, Paul opposed autonomous learning because he thought it was of little value to the child. However, as Paul is widely known in the EHE community for his outspoken views and his support for the Badman Review (2009) his response needs to be seen in context. Nevertheless, views such as these are important to document because they highlight the frictions and differences that exist within the community; although as mentioned, such views were not representative of the sample generally. In fact, there was a sense among respondents that home educators and home educating groups were more supportive now than ever before:

I think in the early days with home ed groups and the different approaches it was more polarised but I think there is more tolerance now because of the internet ... They get to hear other voices. **(Mia, parent)**

For children and young people the conflict or differences apparent in the EHE community were not borne out in their experiences although there was recognition that EHE groups had many different aims or objectives First, educational motivations are outlined with one respondent mentioning the environmental activities engaged in and another referring to GCSE lessons:

After moving to the UK [from New Zealand at the age of nine] we joined a home school group which does lots of environmental activities and we work towards awards ... We've done lots of things that most people would not have the chance to do such as camping in the Wyre forest where we did lots of things including pond dipping, lighting fires, building shelters, looking for deer, toasting marshmallows, singing songs and weaving **(Extract from Katie's story, child)**.

Lucas, Archie and I were all part of the same home education group. We sat lessons and stuff for our GCSEs and we all chipped in for a tutor. We had these big nature reserves and fields we rented out and we had a few huts where we did lessons in and we hung out ... During the years we did GCSEs we had about four or five lessons a week, so four or five hours a week, maybe a bit more than that in a class. **(Liam, young person)**

The educational purposes that underpinned these two groups were, therefore, very different but despite their apparent differences there were also similarities. Both respondents mentioned that they were working towards discernible goals that featured certificates or qualifications. However, it is necessary to mention that obtaining educational awards was regarded as being significantly less important than actually learning new things or being involved in different activities.

Below are examples of some of the activities pursued and experiences gained during my time with the Environmental Home Education Group.

### **8.4.1 Examples of Environmental Group activities**

#### **Brief introduction**

The group met every two weeks in a church hall in Shropshire (eight children were involved in the group from five families). I attended the group over a 12-month period. It is, therefore, not possible to list all of the activities the children and I were involved in but nonetheless an overview is provided.

For point of reference, Kara was leader of the 'Fair Trade' project and works for a Shropshire-based charity called Bridges.

**20/01/11**

#### **Task One**

##### *Manufacture of clothes*

Kara gave each child a worksheet and a map. The purpose of the task was to find out where our clothes are made (i.e. shoes/jumpers) and then put it on a map of the world. The children were very interested in this and were taking off their shoes and jumpers to find the labels. Jack took off his Converse trainers and initially thought they would be made in America because they are a US brand, but they were made in China. The task also provided another opportunity to get more information about the children's interests. The worksheet asked: 'What is your favourite book?'

I spoke to Sophie and Katie about their favourite books and they seemed really interested in literature. Sophie is an avid reader of Terry Pratchett novels. Katie likes classics such as Little Women (her favourite book), Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights.

## **Task Two**

### *Facts about Cocoa*

Kara placed a large map (imprinted on a shower curtain) on the floor and wanted the children to think about the countries where cocoa is produced and where it is consumed the most. Kara took out place cards and if correct would place it on the country. The children were more boisterous in this activity, especially the younger ones, with Jack shouting out and pointing to the countries he knew or had visited (like most of the children he was well-travelled). At the end of the activity Kara said that in the countries where cocoa is produced, most of the cocoa farmers will not have tasted chocolate. All of the children thought this was unfair, not only because it tasted nice but because the farmers had worked hard to pick the cocoa for sale.

The last 30 minutes was spent playing a game that had no relevance to fair trade but was sometimes played at the end of sessions. It involved running to various spaces in the room called lifeboat and starboard and doing actions consistent with sailors, such as climb the rigging. Sophie outlined all the rules in precise detail. For example, if you are the last person to reach the specified destination you are out. All the children had a great time with this game.

**3/03/11**

### *Going Bananas*

Kara split the group into three banana-growing 'families'. Each family had to grow bananas over a period of three years and we could sell the bananas in bunches of five. We had a banana stencil and had to draw around it, cut it out and then colour it in green with one of the crayons we had been provided.

In the first year my family did not sell very many because the children at the beginning were too focused on making the bananas look pretty, rather than selling them. We only sold one bunch and we picked a chance card which said that we had to pay \$15 tax. So we could only afford housing which was \$10 and clothing which was \$30

In the second year we did not fare much better and we ended up having no clothes, so we had to take our shoes off. This was no bother to the children – Amelia said she liked it although my feet were beginning to freeze on the cold hall! In the third year, in order to get our shoes back, the children realised that it no longer mattered how the bananas looked as long as we could sell them. We made over \$140 in the last year; our best total.

The children really liked the game and were slightly competitive with the other families. At the end of the game we fed back to the group and said how we did. Sophie said that in her group in order to save money rather than buy food, they ate their bananas that they could not sell which I thought was an ingenious idea and one I had not thought of!

Break:

In the break, while Kara was working with some of the other children on their citizenship packs, the children decided to play a 'levitation game' where all they rub their hands on the person's head and try to pick the individual up. They tried it with me and I was understandably anxious, because the youngest child trying to lift me up was nine. Four of the children grabbed a leg and each arm and succeeded in lifting me up. It was very amusing and helped to further build trust between myself and the children although I am still very confused how they managed it!

**17/03/11**

*Fair trade presentation*

A representative from Bridgnorth Fair Trade Group came in this afternoon to deliver a brief PowerPoint Presentation on Fair Trade. He spoke about the amount of Fair Trade items that you can buy and the impact this has on farmers in Sri Lanka. He asked the children where Sri Lanka was on a map and Jake pointed to the correct place.

At the end of the presentation the children we asked to make a Fair Trade banner. The template was a triangle in keeping with the organisation's logo. Prior to starting the task, the representative asked the children to guess the type of triangle used in the banner. Sophie guessed immediately it was an isosceles triangle, although the younger children struggled with this question. The children all appeared to enjoy making their own banner. Jake drew a Dubble Fair Trade chocolate bar on his and Katie put the word 'freedom' on hers.

**28/04/11**

*Fair trade shop*

Today was the Fair Trade cafe. All of the children and parents made food (from cakes to biscuits), displays and banners to show family members and colleagues. There was also a Fair Trade shop set up by one mother that sold Fair Trade pasta, sugar and condiments. At the centre of the hall there was a display entitled 'inspired' and it certainly was! At the front of the display was a grouse (bird) made from paper mache and chicken wire. Katie told me how Sophie and her mum went about making it. There was also a painting of mountains. It was in keeping with the theme of fair trade and the group's commitment to the environment.

On the display there were also scrap books of all the work the children had done over the past few years. One was named the 'John Muir award': an environmental scheme which focuses on wild places. It encourages awareness and responsibility for the natural environment.

The Fair Trade PowerPoint presentation was the highlight of the café because all the children had been involved in producing a Fair Trade advert. Jack was certainly the star of the show as he sang 'go Fair Trade, go Fair Trade' which mimicked the famous 'confused.com' advert. All the parents and children thought it was funny and there was an encore. I also got to speak to some of the fathers today as they had come along to be involved in the café, with the exception of one father who was at work. They asked me how my research was going and I gave them a brief overview.

During the Fair Trade café visit, Sophie and Katie presented me with some fabric white and purple flowers tied together by wire, with a pink label saying 'Thanks Jeanette'. This was such a lovely gesture as they must have spent a great deal of time cutting out the fabric to make the flowers and putting them together. I was very touched.



**09/06/11**

*Visit to Stiperstones, Shropshire*

Today we went to see a hermit called father Leuellen. He is a member of the Christian Orthodox Church. We had the privilege to enter the chapel where he prays which was absolutely amazing, and he told us about the significance of the paintings and his religion. Father Leuellen spoke for about half an hour in great detail about his life but despite this the children sat quietly and listened. I have to say I was surprised at the lack of fidgeting.

The children asked Father Leuellen really interesting questions. Jack asked, 'How can he afford to live there?' and Father mentioned that he lives on 'gifts' or donations.

Laura asked when he meditates does he say a mantra and Father said he does and described how 'alleluia' means 'I am' – so God is within us. Other questions focused on his daily routine and also who the paintings in the chapel were made by.

## Summary

Thus, as is apparent from the selected notes, the children and their parents engaged in a whole host of activities which they enjoyed as much as I did. This again reiterates the importance of EHE groups not only as a resource for learning, but also as a means of interacting with and talking to others. It was obvious that the children valued the activities, but also enjoyed their free time as they could play with each other and make up games. In addition, the parents enjoyed talking to other mothers while supporting the children on the activities undertaken. Participating in this group, therefore, was certainly valuable because it gave me a broader insight into the experiences of EHE families and also reinforced the level of commitment and dedication it takes to pursue and sustain a group such as this given that parents fund and run the group themselves. Whether this group is typical of other EHE groups is unclear but it certainly was a model that worked and encouraged participation by parents and children, regardless of age.

The following extract further outlines the benefits of EHE groups although in this case the groups were specifically mentioned as a platform for social interaction:

I do water sports once a month with a home educated group on a Thursday from 9.45 in the morning till 4.00, late afternoon. At water sports we do lots of things. Sometimes we do canoeing in the morning or other times we do things like raft building or bush craft ... I also have other hobbies; I really, really enjoy ice skating and horse riding. I have my own horse called Pinkie and I am a member of West Warwickshire Pony Club. I also own ice skates and once a month a home school group go ice skating so we go with them. That is 1:45 till 4:00. I enjoy that. (**Extract from Emma's story**).

Emma gained a lot from attending these groups as she was not only learning new skills (sailing, canoeing and ice skating) but also got to participate with other home educated young people of a similar age to her (teenagers). This is important to

mention because not all EHE groups have a mixed age group as many cater for younger children. It may also explain why she put particular emphasis on the social side of these groups, rather than focusing on the educational aspects.

However, although EHE groups were valued by respondents for the educational and social opportunities they afforded, they were by no means the only groups participated in: all of the children and the majority of young people had been involved in a range of other activities (not organised solely for EHE families) at one point or another. The activities ranged from fencing, to ice hockey, to cadets, to volunteering projects as the following extracts indicate:

I do fencing and I have got friends from fencing so it's not just the education world that gets you friends and that is what people think of when they ask me, 'How do you have friends if you don't go to school?' They don't think of all the other things that I do. (**Olly, young person**)

I do lots of things ... I used to go horse riding but I don't go anymore as I don't want to. I do ice hockey and I want to be with the Junior Barons. I also do Scouts. That is normally at night time ... I like to do stunt scootering now at the skate park and I have got a few friends who do that. (**Mike, child**)

Cadets is something I do on Monday and Wednesday nights. We do sport, lessons, DofE, flying (I've never done this), gliding, field craft and drill (marching, saluting and so on) as well as various projects ... *In the park behind my house there is a museum – my family and I volunteer there. We help to run the tearoom (though we get to eat the left over cake) and we help out at the events.* (**Sophie, child** – part story/part interview)

Further, other activities that were mentioned by respondents included ballet, swimming, gymnastics, international folk dancing and writing pen pal letters. The level of commitment differed between activities with some respondents mentioning that they participated on a weekly or monthly basis. None of the respondents pursued these activities daily because such activities were seen to complement their EHE experiences, rather than dominate them. Additionally, children and young people felt it was their choice to take part in these activities, as the above extract with Mike highlighted.



EHE families, therefore, participated in a wide variety of groups which included groups established to obtain qualifications or awards, or in order to learn new skills. The diversity of the groups founded and participated in also echoes the diversity of the population and their practices. Nonetheless, despite differing motivations for participation, what was clear from respondents and my own observations was the value placed upon involvement and engagement with these groups. This was not only because it enhanced educational and social opportunities for the children and young people, but also because it provided a support network for parents.

### **8.4.2 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the practices and activities (social or otherwise) pursued by EHE families were diverse, whether they were focused in the home or other environments. Even families who were following similar approaches (i.e. structured, autonomous or semi-structured) had their own way of doing things and thus there was little commonality aside from the fact they associated with a particular approach. The sub-categories for EHE practice mentioned here (and echoed in the literature, see Thomas and Pattison, 2007), therefore, do not conclusively determine how families learn or the provision utilised because for the most part families follow their own pathway. As a result, it is difficult to determine the successes or failures of the practices mentioned because they are approached in different ways and for different purposes. This obviously has implications for the nature of home education inquiry more generally because it cannot be presumed that home educators who correspond to a certain approach necessarily have the same ideals (lifestyle or otherwise) as home educators who affiliate or are affiliated (by researchers) to such categories. More importantly, it raises questions over why such categories are used in home education research in the first place and their purpose.

The simple answer, and perhaps the most reasonable, is that it helps the researcher to describe the learning styles of home educators. Perhaps then, the definitions that have been used and continue to be used when summarising home education practice are unsuitable, because in many cases the ‘tidy categories’ mentioned do not fit the rationales, aims and practices of home educating families. Certainly in my study,

many respondents found it difficult to define how they learnt and by what method. Moreover, the joy of home education for many was that it did not fit neatly into prearranged descriptors or sub-categories; it was nuanced and evolved over time.

Another interesting finding that was brought to the fore in this chapter was the high level of participation and involvement in EHE and extracurricular groups. These groups were valued not only as a resource for social interaction with other children and adults but were also seen as complementing educational efforts in the home. For instance, children participated in activities which had an environmental focus on art- and history-based activities. I am aware, however, that the high level of participation in these groups could be the result of my sample population (some of whom were selected via EHE groups), although existing research does seem to substantiate the conclusions drawn (see Hanna, 2011).

The next chapter will provide information about the experiences of EHE families, specifically focusing on the benefits and limitations of EHE.

## 9 Chapter 9: Experiences of EHE

### 9.1 Introduction

In this chapter the benefits and disadvantages of EHE are explored. The benefits of EHE are discussed first as they highlight what the respondents value about this provision and the experiences afforded as a result. Second, the disadvantages of EHE and their implications are discussed as they provide further insight into the experiences of families who have been or are currently engaged in EHE.

### 9.2 Benefits

Overall, the consensus of opinion among the respondents was that EHE has numerous benefits. One of the most notable themes cited centred upon the quality of educational opportunities provided as a result of one-to-one time between parent and child (or tutors) and the ability to learn through questioning/exploring.

#### 9.2.1 One-to-one time

The benefits of one to one interaction were rated highly by respondents, not only because of the time spent with family members (with parents particularly) but also because it had favourable effects on learning. The following extract emphasises this point:

I mean I think I learnt so much more, because in a lesson in school the teacher will spend half an hour shouting at the children and 15 minutes setting up and 15 minutes of whatever we are learning, but then obviously at home I am getting four times as much. **(Finley, young person)**

The ability to concentrate without disruption from teachers and peers was regarded as advantageous and echoes other responses made. Nonetheless, children and young people with SEN found one-to-one time particularly beneficial because their learning needs were catered for in a supportive way, as a young person poignantly highlights:

The ability to work around learning difficulties, dyspraxia, dyslexia, is so much better at home ... As soon as I came out of school suddenly I could take more time over things ... School can be a brutal place and I think the environment of home education just feels a little bit nicer, friendlier ...  
**(Nathan, young person)**

This extract reinforces what the majority of respondents with SEN found, that EHE is effective as it allows one-to-one supervision and support in a safe and encouraging environment. The ability to address a child's special needs in an environment that is eminently suitable and conducive for such needs has also been rated highly in other studies. In Fortune-Wood's study (2006), for example, parents mentioned that EHE helped to reduce SEN symptoms because individual needs were focused upon, which in turn led to less stressed, happier children.

The opportunity to learn through life in everyday conversations or travel in the UK and abroad was also regarded as a significant benefit of EHE.

## **9.2.2 Learning through conversations**

First, the extracts emphasise the value of engaging in conversations:

I think home education makes you more open minded because you are around so many different people and you have the opportunity for more discussions. You explore different subjects, like more understanding of the world beyond.  
**(Olly, young person)**

You get quite a lot out of conversations. I mean I am interested in economics because I got involved in the transition towns movement. Through that I met an economist who was very interested in Marxian Economics and started a currency with him. So it wasn't, 'Today I'm going to learn about economics'. It was just one conversation led to another, led to another. **(Lauren, young person)**

The above extracts reveal that engaging in conversations with people either within or outside the EHE community helped to inform and facilitate their educational experiences and views of the world. For Lauren particularly, there was a marked sense that learning was about finding and growing interests rather than having to

achieve some indefinable future goal that requires a learning outcome. This may also explain why travel in the UK and abroad was viewed so highly by respondents.

### 9.2.3 Travel

Travel was seen to provide further opportunities for discussion and exploration, as echoed by the two extracts below:

I think there is a perception of home education that the children are stuck at home but of course it is not. I think it should be called '*world education*'. We visit museums and places of interest on a monthly basis at least ... So when people say, 'What about socialisation?' You just laugh because you just think did you have the experiences we had? Did you get to visit lots of places?  
(**Amanda, parent**)

We have been to New Zealand, Australia and several countries in Europe: Spain, Italy, France, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Ireland. So we have been around a fair bit. We have travelled around and he has seen exciting things all over the world and why shouldn't they? Because it is possible these days. (**Pippa, parent**)

The ability to go to museums or travel and experience different cultures as and when appropriate was regarded as a notable benefit of EHE. Certainly, parents acknowledged that if their children attended school the opportunity to visit local places of interests or travel abroad would be limited. The following extract provided by one parent, emphasises this:

... home education isn't just about trips but it is nice that Jack can get a sense of travel and culture. I remember when we wanted to have the Monday off school for a weekend in Paris and when I read his report so many months later it said that attendance needed to be seen to. He only had one day off! He saw all these wonderful things and practised his French ... (**Catherine, parent**)

The inability of schools to recognise the value of trips abroad, which can include learning a foreign language, was met by general dismay by parents. The consensus of opinion was that travel broadens horizons as it encourages the development of new skills and interests alongside the implementation of existing skills. For example:

If we were going to visit a foreign country we would learn a bit of the language if we don't already know it, because that is just what they do and it

wouldn't occur to them that they wouldn't be able to do that. The idea of learning about absolutely anything doesn't faze them at all. They define themselves as people who learn things rather than people who can't.

**(Samantha, parent)**

The opportunity to pursue interests without the confines of a school structure was viewed positively by parents. This also echoes the views of children and young people who regarded the flexibility afforded by EHE as a significant benefit. The key themes centred on lack of time pressure, ability to follow interests and adapt learning style.

#### **9.2.4 No time pressure**

Among the sample there was an overwhelming consensus that learning should be dictated by the individual rather than by time constraints. It may also explain why the majority of respondents (teenagers in particular) were not concerned about following a particular time structure with regards to their work as they valued the freedom to plan or pursue interests at their own time and pace. This is highlighted below:

You can go anywhere you want and you can do it any time you want. You can wake up at 2.00 in the afternoon if you want and do five or six hours of work and then do what you want for the rest of the night. At the end of the day it should suit you as you're the one learning ... **(Riley, young person)**

There is an advantage to the flexible hours as well. You don't have to get everything done within the school hours. You can keep going longer or get it done quicker or do it at a particular time. I get up quite late but then I can work into the night ... I'm going to go conservative and say I get up at 10.30 ... Then I will work as long as I need to in order to get the work done.

**(Nathan, young person)**

The following extracts highlight further the benefits afforded by time with regards to pursuing interests and adapting learning styles to suit individual needs.

#### **9.2.5 Pursue interests**

The response by Jack below summarises how EHE has provided him with the opportunity to focus on and develop his interest in art and design:

I like all the things I do, especially art. I have time to enter competitions with my art or stories ... I won the National Geographic competition to find the best young adventurer and got to go to London ... I said in my poem that you can have adventures everywhere, far away or close to home with your family or on your own. I did a drawing as well and I wrote about Ranulph Fiennes as my celebrity ... (**Jack, child**)

For Jack, winning the National Geographic competition was an amazing experience. He spoke animatedly about going to London with his parents and meeting the other competitors (many of whom were older) and getting 'free' orange juice in a private room! Aside from the 'free' orange juice, which Jack mentioned on many occasions as it made him feel like a celebrity, the main highlight was meeting Ben Fogle (Star of reality programme, *Castaway*) who announced he was the winner and presented him with a prize. The prize was a book about adventures which Ben Fogle had signed with the words: 'I think you are a brilliant adventurer and I hope to read your book when you are older'. This example really typified Jack's attitudes towards EHE as he was enthusiastic about his experiences and none more so than when talking about his passion for art and design (see Appendix 8 for examples of Jack's Art Work).

Moreover, having the time to adapt learning styles to individual needs was also viewed highly.

### 9.2.6 Adapt learning style

The extract provided below between Ben and his mum is one such example:

**Ben** – I have two things that I like about home schooling ... Whenever mum reads she gets us to pop into some sleeping bags and sometimes when mum does history she gets out some (asthma) inhalers and teddy bears and mum does loads of other fun stuff ...

**Mum (Joy)** – Yes we did the feudal system using inhalers and teddy bears to represent the different people such as peasants as it helps them understand it. We have the time to do it, so why not?

As is evident, fun and engaging approaches were utilised because as Joy mentioned there was time to do it. However, this does not mean to say that parents on a daily

basis use such approaches because it depends upon the child, family circumstances and on occasions the weather, as highlighted:

I also think that if something is happening we can go off and do that. So if it is a nice day we can go up the park and do some painting or sketching ... (**Lynn, parent**)

Again, the flexibility provided by EHE meant that families could ‘down tools’ at home and ‘pick them up outside’ (Lynn) and make the most of the good weather and the surrounding environment. It is necessary to mention, however, that the benefits of flexibility were not only cited in my study: previous research studies have also mentioned it.

Jackson’s (2007) qualitative research study with three Australian EHE students (one female, 15 and two males, 10 and 17) who had made transitions between formal education and home education found that respondents valued the freedom and flexibility of EHE. This was emphasised by Robert (17):

... you could work at your own pace which was good. You’re in control of how you’re studying ... So you can decide how you want to learn the thing ... you don’t have to learn it by essay or the worksheets the teacher gives you, you can learn it the way you want to ... (p7)

Similarly, Clery’s (1998) qualitative study with two home schooled (female) children in Australia (12 and 13) revealed that the participants immensely enjoyed home schooling because they had greater autonomy. For example, participant A stated that in a school situation she would not be allowed to choose the subjects she studied or focus on areas of interest. Similarly, participant B mentioned that learning can take place anywhere at any time which is not the case in schools. However, interestingly, although the participants regarded home schooling as giving them greater freedom and flexibility over their learning they still viewed home schooling as another type of schooling. This is because they associated learning, studying and developing with schooling. In contrast, children and young people in my sample differentiated EHE with schooling because there was a general consensus that the two learning experiences were completely different.



I recognise, however, that this could be due to the fact that the majority of children and young people in my study followed a semi-structured or autonomous approach which differs from the learning experience provided in a school setting. Nevertheless, how EHE is perceived by the sample and the advantages they associate with it, as opposed to schooling, is important to mention because it provides further detail about their experiences of EHE as well as revealing their views of school education (if they attended school).

One of the key themes cited regarding the differences between EHE and schooling was the development of 'life skills' which ranged from developing as a person, to practical skills, to motivation, to confidence.

### **9.2.7 Develop as a person**

The extracts below summarise how EHE helped to inform their personal development, as well as their educational development:

I think the best thing is it lets individuals know themselves. I mean I didn't know who I was when I was in school. I was just one of everyone and I think the absolutely most amazing thing about home education is it brings people with character. If you look at humanity through the ages it's always the characters, whether they be good or bad or doing something completely wacky, that make it interesting. I think the school system actually ... It's like a monoculture if something goes wrong the whole thing topples. Whereas home education is like having a proper mixed meadow which is more nutritious and doesn't get damaged so much if there is a drought. It is much more flexible and I think it produces people who are much more emotionally happy and healthy I guess. **(Lauren, young person)**

I really credit what I am now to the people I met through home education. In school I tried to follow along with what everyone was doing as much as I could so I could fit in. You don't have to do that in home education. I can remember the changes I went through when I first got to home education from being like more aggressive and angry to a lot more laid back ... **(Tom, young person)**

The above responses provide a revealing insight into the effect EHE had upon their character and the way they now see themselves. In particular, there was a sense that during their school experience they did not know who they were as people or what

they wanted from life. This was associated with peer pressure and trying to conform to the ideals of the school environment. However, once the decision was taken to EHE what was clear was how much happier both respondents were and the value they placed upon their experiences, with Lauren eloquently referring to EHE as a ‘mixed meadow’ that was nutritiously enriching for the soul. In addition, EHE was thought to develop vocational and practical skills from cooking to motivation and self-confidence.

### 9.2.8 Life skills

EHE was regarded as enhancing personal development (i.e. practical skills) and also impacting positively upon parent-child relationships. This is because a great deal of time was spent talking to their parents about the activities they were learning or engaging in together. The extracts below summarise the responses made:

... I think home educating people have better life skills because they spend a lot of time with their families so they pick up habits from their parents in terms of cooking and stuff. My girlfriend who was home educated could cook a full meal by the time she was 8. **(Riley, young person)**

I think it has made me more independent. In school everything is done for you really. The work is given to you and you are just told to learn it. Now I am home educated I have a better grasp of the real world so to speak. I know how to manage finances, how to cook ... In school stuff like that isn't the focus when it should be really. **(Sarah, young person)**

This also supports existing literature, which suggests that EHE promotes a ‘closeness’ between parent and child, and facilitates the development of practical skills because they are involved in the day-to-day activities of the household (see Thomas and Pattison, 2007; Merry and Howell, 2009).

However, although traditional activities such as cooking were mentioned by the majority of respondents and supported by the literature, there were also examples of children and young people using their initiative to further enhance their practical skills. I vividly remember on one occasion making a research visit to an EHE family

where the eldest boy (of three siblings) was making soap using different animal moulds (see below).

#### **9.2.8.1 Research visit**

Joseph talked me through the process of how to make soap and the different ingredients needed. He said I would not be able to see the final result because it would take hours to set. Fortunately, he mentioned in a way similar to the Blue Peter format that he had made some earlier (interestingly he had been on Blue Peter informing others how to tie-dye a t-shirt) and asked whether I would like to buy one for a £1. Of course I duly obliged and decided on the fish shaped soap mainly because I liked the colour as it was a combination of green and purple – very unusual! Joseph even gift wrapped it for me in blue paper and tied it with a gold ribbon and suggested that it would make a nice present as it was coming up to Christmas.

I was very impressed by the entrepreneurial flair shown by Joseph and his explanation of how to make soap which I was clueless about prior to meeting him. However, his mother Amanda explained that this was not out of character for her son because she remarked that ‘he is ever the entrepreneur’ and has on occasions stood outside his old school (just round the corner) and sold soap to his school friends and their parents. However more recently, Joseph has begun building wooden crosses to sell at their Church because he has learnt that if he gives a certain percentage of the profits to the Church people are more inclined to put in an order. I was invited to see one of his creations and again I told Joseph what a good job he had done. Making the crosses obviously required a great deal of skill and perseverance as Joseph told me that the wood joints have to be aligned just so. On this occasion I was not asked to buy a cross but I think it was more to do with the fact that he already had a number of orders which is just as well because I’m sure I could quite have easily parted with more money! Joseph was, therefore, not short of ability or confidence but according to his mother his confidence and self-belief had grown sharply as a result of being EHE.

The following extracts provide further information about how EHE impacted upon the motivation and confidence of respondents:

... I definitely think that home education had an effect in increasing my motivation and making me proactive and interested in a variety of things. You don't have a teacher telling you what to do, you think for yourself ... Over summer I worked as a marketing assistant for an ICT Company in the city and I am also an active member of the Labour Party ... (**Carly, young person**)

When I first came out of school I lost all my confidence but now I'm more confident than when I was in school. I am not as shy as I was. I have the chance to talk to lots of different people who listen to me. I will also go with one of my friends from the home-ed group around Lichfield. Mum will be in Lichfield somewhere but I won't know where she will be. (**Jennifer, child**)

The extracts highlight that EHE forced respondents to be more motivated and confident because they were in effect free to experiment and challenge themselves. This led to positive developments regarding their inner motivation and confidence but also the way they portrayed themselves to the outside world. Jennifer for example, lacked confidence in her social abilities because in school she felt nobody listened to her or paid her any attention. However, once the decision was taken to EHE both Jennifer and her mother noticed that she had grown in confidence and stature as a consequence of interacting with people of all ages who importantly took the time to listen. I was surprised initially that Jennifer and her mother found her social ability to be in question because I found her to be an engaging and delightful child whose skills belied her 12 years. I even provided written evidence to support this as Jennifer's mother asked me for a written description of her skills for an award portfolio that she was working towards. The impact of EHE upon motivation and confidence should, therefore, not be underestimated because, as cited, it affects how respondents view themselves and their place in the world. Other studies have also reported the positive impact of EHE upon self-motivation and confidence, with a quote by Zara (15) reinforcing this poignantly:

When I was home schooled, I developed a lot more self-esteem than I did when I was at school ... before I was home schooled I was really shy ... I was one of those people that just sat in a corner and just listened rather than spoke up. Now I'm exactly the opposite. I've realised that I'm a person that no one's going to tease me for telling my opinion. (Jackson, 2007, p6)

EHE was regarded highly by respondents because it encouraged new skills to develop or enhanced existing skills. Even so, despite the benefits cited there were also disadvantages to this provision. The next section provides detail about the disadvantages of EHE and the impact this has upon respondents with regard to educational or social opportunities.

## **9.3 Disadvantages**

The main disadvantages mentioned focused primarily upon the lack of support and resources that families had access to. In particular, the financial cost of EHE was cited by a large proportion of the sample (with the exception of children who seemed unaware for the most part of the financial sacrifices made).

### **9.3.1 Financial concerns**

Financial concerns related to the associated expenses of EHE and the fact that in many cases parents had to leave employment to home educate full time. The extracts below provide an overview of the comments made:

You are always broke because you are relying on one salary. I had a good career as an analyst for the National Grid but I gave it up to home educate ... You never ever have enough resources. You might have what you need but you could always do with more. There is no funding for exams either, so GCSEs cost a ridiculous amount. Emma is coming up to that age now but it's about £100 for one GCSE ... **(Dawn, parent)**

I would say financial for starters because you have either got to have one parent full time educating or you are going to have tutors. Both are going to cost you money ... My mother used to work from home a bit and is starting to do a bit now, but she sort of dropped everything to teach us for a while. My dad actually had two jobs for a while. It is not something you step into lightly ... **(Nathan, young person)**

As is evident, EHE was regarded as a strain financially and was further compounded by the fact that public services (i.e. LAs) are not required to provide funding for exams or resources (educational or otherwise). However, the dissatisfaction cited was not only confined to my study because it echoes literature on EHE more generally.

In Smith-Fields and William's (2009) US study, parents mentioned that home schooling was a financial burden due to parents giving up work (women were eight times more likely to do so) or significantly reducing hours of work to accommodate home schooling. Of the 24 parents that were interviewed, 21 left jobs or careers to home school. These ranged from clerical, retail or entrepreneurial roles (nine) to positions in business and law (eight) or teaching and nursing posts (four). Moreover, in Fortune-Wood's (2006) UK study, one family actually lost their business and home in order to take responsibility for home educating their SEN child:

I have had to give up my business. We have had to sell our house and move into rented accommodation to free up the equity in the house to cover the drop in income. I feel angry that the LEA is under no obligation to provide any financial assistance towards the education of my children. (p75)

Parents had to make numerous sacrifices to EHE and although parents were willing to make them (outlined poignantly by Fortune-Wood's 2006 example) they frequently stated their desire for more resources and support from public services.

### **9.3.2 Problems of access**

In particular parents/guardians with older children (teenagers) were more likely to express frustration or even anger about the difficulties of accessing exam centres, college courses and work experience placements. The extracts below summarise the comments made:

The fact that you have to pay for all your exams and you have to rush around from exam centre to exam centre ... You are more or less forced to spread it over two years with the GCSEs because otherwise they might overlap and you can't be in two different towns at the same time. (**Joy, parent**)

Access to courses is an issue. There are a lot of courses out there but most of them are for adults who are going back into education. They are designed for people who have failed or gone back, or for people who skipped it entirely ... (**Margaret, grandparent**)

There is a lack of options for work experience. When I phoned up for Aaron they said, 'Oh but he is not on a school roster so he can't'. I said he is not in a school but he is still in full-time education so we should be able to do the same for him. Because I was persistent with one of them she said, 'What we can do

is issue a work permit for him but he would only be able to go to the place in the holidays ...' (**Pippa, parent**)

The above extracts illustrate the minefield that parents have to navigate in order to obtain the resources or support that is provided to school children without question. In many cases parents felt it was unjust because they too paid their taxes. Similarly, young people felt aggrieved and frustrated that they were not afforded the same advantages as school children based solely on the fact they were educated at home.

For example:

It is very, very, very expensive to do exams ... I don't think it is fair because we are still paying for our schools in our taxes. Well I'm not, but I will in the future. There is not even an extra benefit out there. There is nothing ... Just because we happened to leave their school system. Well, their school system failed us! (**Issac, young person**)

The response of Issac regarding the 'failure' of the school system echoes the views of the majority of young people who felt they were been failed again as a consequence of a lack of support. Indeed, for eight young people (out of the 41 interviewed) the problems encountered with regard to accessing funding for exams and exam centres was seen to detrimentally impact their decision in terms of taking formal qualifications and the number taken. For example:

I didn't end up taking my GCSEs. I asked the Prince's Trust for money for my GCSEs and the total cost of it was about £700 and I asked for a grant of £450 and everything seemed to be going good, they were like 'Yes, yes, it will be fine' and then they were like 'We can't do it' and they never gave me a reason why ... (**Sarah, young person**)

By the time I came to do my maths GCSE a local exam centre had closed down so I had to go to Bristol. It was two papers so it was two days getting to Bristol. So I had to get up at 4.00 in the morning on a day you are doing exams is not great ... The cost of the exam and the train tickets, it didn't seem worth it. I might have done science or something if there was an exam centre closer. But for all the hassle and the cost ... (**Hannah, young person**)

Arguably, therefore, the lack of support offered for EHE young people in terms of access to exams or exam centres is problematic. While it is important to acknowledge

that not all home educating young people in this study wanted to take formal qualifications, for those who did there seemed to be barriers to access. This contradicts somewhat the government's pledge that *Every Child Matters*. Surely this needs to be addressed because currently the situation is not just or fair. Even so, I acknowledge that given the lack of public funding due to the world recession and the resistance of some within the EHE community to any kind of government involvement, it would not be an easy or smooth process. Nevertheless, it should at least be considered because the overwhelming sense of opinion from EHE young people was that funding should be available to those who want it. The disadvantages of EHE regarding resources and support were not only focused on exams or exam centres, there was also notable dissatisfaction expressed by respondents regarding access to specialist knowledge or apparatus.

### **9.3.3 Specialist support**

The view from the sample group was that specialist knowledge or facilities could be provided to home educated children and young people, as currently it is either unavailable or difficult to access. The following three extracts reinforce the points made by adults, children and young people:

I think the disadvantage would be the opportunities, because although home education teaches you to think outside the box it doesn't necessarily grant you the opportunities ...As a home educator if you want to learn French, for example, you either struggle to do it yourself at home or you just say, 'Well we can't do that until another point'. (**Carrie, young person**)

There are probably things that you can do in school that are a bit more difficult to do when you are home educated. For example, woodwork ... we have got some working tools but we don't really know what to do with them that much ... (**Sophie, child**)

I looked into using a science lab locally but they would only let schools use it. There is no sensible reason why a home education group couldn't go and use that lab, it is just policy. (**Joy, parent**)

These comments reveal the restrictions that EHE young people and their families encounter with respect to engagement with or access to specialist knowledge and facilities. It may also explain why the majority of parents (12) in this study were



happy to be known to their LA (although in many cases the information wasn't provided voluntarily – due to school withdrawal).

### 9.3.4 Lack of LA support

Home educators for the most part desired a more collaborative partnership with LAs and schools than experienced at present. LA 'support' (although the term was used loosely) was seen to be focused on 'tick box' exercises and form filling rather than actually getting to know the requirements or needs of families. This is emphasised by the extract below:

A disadvantage is that you don't get more support from the LA. We are visited by them but it is just a visit once a year and they fill in some forms and then they say they are happy and then they go again. There is no actual help provided ... (**Pippa, parent**)

Interestingly, however, this differs from the majority of studies on EHE where home educators to a large extent were opposed to LA support or involvement (see Ofsted, 2010, *Local Authorities and Home Education*). It is worth noting that this could reflect the conduct and timing of the study or the biases of the researcher rather than the experiences of the population per se. The Ofsted (2010) study is one such example because it was conducted quite soon after the publication of the Badman Review (2009) which proposed controversial changes relating to how LA professionals govern the education and safeguarding of EHE children. Even so, it is important to mention that while parents in my sample wanted greater support, there was also a high degree of scepticism about how the support would be ring fenced and whether there would be rules imposed. The majority of respondents were dissatisfied with LA officers' knowledge of EHE because they had numerous job roles (e.g. school improvement). For example:

The knowledge of EHE varies between LAs and their personal stance on whether it should be allowed ... There is a lot of prejudice. There is a lot of prejudice against hippies and autonomous education; there is a lot of prejudice against right wing Christians indoctrinating their children and so if people have got a prejudice against anything they will flag up problems in a family which aren't necessarily there. (**Charlotte, parent**)

The support structures for EHE were regarded as being in need of work, both in terms of the funding provided and the knowledge and skills of practitioners. This is in marked contrast to the US home schooling context where an increasing number of states and school districts actively ‘court’ homeschoolers. One notable example is the State of Washington which has become a national leader in establishing partnerships with homeschoolers.

The Home School Resource Centre allows home schooled children to choose from a rotating menu of classes in subjects such as sign language, art, karate and modern dance. Alternatively, home schooled children that do not want to participate in the more structured classes are still welcome to use the computer centre or library. Similarly, the Maricopa County School District in Arizona is tailoring services to homeschoolers and offering weekly enrichment classes at satellite campuses and strip malls in a wide variety of subject areas from modern dance to photography (Gaither, 2009b). It is important to mention, however, that the resources provided by US school districts for home schooling families is certainly not the norm and may reflect the fact that the US has the largest (estimated) home schooling population in the world.

The lack of resources and support was, therefore, a notable disadvantage for respondents in this study. Nevertheless, it was not the only disadvantage cited as older children and young people in particular regarded the lack of peer group social interaction as a pertinent issue.

### **9.3.5 Lack of peer group interaction**

Peer group interaction had to be explicitly sought through attendance at EHE groups or other social activities. The following three extracts summarise the comments made:

... I think sometimes it would be cool to hang out with people your own age and no one else sometimes ... That is why I quite like going to Cadets, well one of them. (**Sophie, child**)

I have come to realise that for a lot of people it is harder to socialise in the sense that you don’t come across as many people your own age unless you make the effort. So you do have to go to groups and stuff and if you don’t do

that and go out with friends and stuff then I suppose you could feel isolated ...  
(**Hannah, young person**)

Without that home education group (Camp Mohawk) I probably wouldn't have had that much socialisation I don't think. I mean there must have been a way somehow but there would have been very few people I think. (**Finley, young person**)

The lack of regular peer group social interaction has also been mentioned as a limitation of EHE in a number of other studies. Shirkey's (1989) study, which asked home school children aged 6 to 13 (who had attended traditional school) to list the advantages and disadvantages of both types of experiences, revealed that the lack of friendships were cited as a disadvantage of home schooling. Older children, however, were more inclined to regard it as an issue. The respondents mentioned that they missed their friends who were still attending conventional school; felt left out of school dances and parties; and were not sure they knew 'what's in style' anymore.

More recently, Jackson's study (2007) with home schooled teenagers in Australia found that peer interaction was a significant limitation. Zara (15) admitted that learning at home could be lonely: '... You get a bit lonely if you don't see your friends all the time' (p10). Further, Robert (17) mentioned that he could not discuss ideas with other students: 'I couldn't discuss things ... you can't just say [to other students] ... 'Hey you, what do you think of this? Or 'Do you understand it?' (p11). Even so, despite the difficulties encountered in regards to meeting and socialising with peers, only two young people in my study felt that their social life had suffered through EHE:

I think that socialisation can be a bit of an issue and I think that I may be a bit more socially awkward than I may otherwise have been but I think that doesn't really matter in the long run. (**Carly, young person**)

Well I lived in a village and the home education groups only met once or twice a week. You still are sociable ... It's not like we are animals and we don't know how to act around other people but that's why I went back to school because I missed the social interaction every day. (**Caroline, young person**)

This similarly echoes the findings of Webb's (1999) UK-based study on outcomes of EHE (20 interviewees, the largest to date). The study found that while peer socialisation was not as frequent as other types of social interaction (between parents or siblings for example) there were still opportunities to facilitate it. However, where there were limited opportunities for participation in groups isolation could occur as substantiated by a respondent in Webb's (1999) study: 'My social life at home was poor ... I did things like tennis and swimming but I didn't have that closeness you get at school' (p44).

Thus, peer socialisation was regarded as a disadvantage of EHE, particularly for teenagers. Nevertheless, in my study generally it was not felt to detrimentally impact the social well-being or social interactions of respondents. I am aware, however, that this could be a result of sampling as for the most part participants were recruited from EHE groups where peer social interactions occurred. Additional debates surrounding EHE and socialisation are discussed in Chapter 11.

### **9.3.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, EHE was not without its disadvantages but as is evident from the responses provided, the disadvantages were accommodated because they were thought to be outweighed by the benefits of this provision. The benefits centred specifically on educational development and personal growth. This should not be seen as all that surprising because arguably the purpose of education (as advocated by theorists, such as Dewey) is about developing and growing as a person. However, as the responses revealed home education was thought to offer far more educational and personal enrichment than that provided by a school education as the child was primarily at the centre of the process and thus learning opportunities were developed accordingly.

In contrast, the value of education provided in a school setting was seen to be limited because in school children are required to follow a core curriculum and a particular learning style, irrespective of whether it suits the child and/or their capabilities. The views mentioned here also appear to echo existing critiques about the nature and

purpose of education and schooling more generally, which suggest that school education has become too focused on accountability and target setting at the detriment of actual learning and enjoyment (Holt, 1977; Kohl, 1970; Meighan, 2004; Harber, 2004). In recent years, such concerns have been raised in two major reports in England (conducted by Alexander, 2009; Rose, 2008) which have proposed that the education system should be ‘redesigned’ to take into account personalised learning, pupil participation, cooperation and flexibility.

The views of the home educating community (adults, children and parents), therefore, add an interesting dimension to debates in this area, particularly since many home educating children have attended school prior to being home educated. The dissatisfaction expressed towards schooling by the sample obviously mirrors their negative experiences, but it also raises interesting questions about the purpose and value of schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the possibilities offered by other educational alternatives.

However, while home education was regarded to have numerous benefits this chapter also discussed the disadvantages associated with this provision. In particular, it centred upon the lack of funding and/or access to services and the limited opportunities available for peer socialisation. Firstly, the lack of funding or access to services was regarded as a notable source of contention for many home educators and their families. While I acknowledge that there were a minority of home educators who did not want any help from the state (financial or otherwise), the majority of home educators were supportive of greater access to funding and/or financial assistance. This supports recent UK reports or research in the public domain which have suggested that improved access to services for EHE families (including increased knowledge and awareness among LAs) is wanted and needed (Kendall and Atkinson, 2006; Badman, 2009; Parsons and Lewis, 2010). The lack of support offered to home educating families thus appears to call into question the government’s commitment to ‘all’ children regardless of background, as outlined in government initiatives (Every Child Matters, 2003) and legislation (Children’s Act, 2004).

Lastly, difficulties surrounding access to peer socialisation was mentioned as an issue by the children and young people sampled because home educated children, unlike school children, are not around their peer group every day. They, therefore, have to actively strive to attend EHE or extracurricular groups to meet children of a similar age. For children it was less of an issue than for teenagers who appear to drop out of EHE groups as they get older. Again, greater funding for home education may help to resolve this problem as there was a consensus of opinion that the majority of EHE groups and activities were tailored to younger children.

However, whether funding for EHE groups would have much impact is questionable because of the development of social networking sites and the diverse nature of the population, but, as is evident, virtual friendships are no supplement to the real thing, and home educated young people were certainly committed to developing friendships with their peers, despite the obvious obstacles.

The next section discusses the outcomes of EHE.

# 10 Chapter 10: Outcomes of EHE

## 10.1 Introduction

First, before discussing the outcomes of EHE, it is necessary to explain what the term means in the context of this study. The ‘outcomes’ of EHE focused on the trajectory of the young people (aged from 16 to 25) in terms of qualifications, transition to further education (college/university) and employment. This echoes research on outcomes more generally which focuses on educational attainment and participation in further education as a measure of future success (see Department for Education Report, *A framework of outcomes for young people*, 2012). However, given the nature of the sample population I was cautious not to devalue ‘other’ qualifications (e.g. Open University short courses) in favour of ‘formal’ qualifications (i.e. GCSEs, IGCSES or A Levels). I therefore asked respondents to name (or write down) the educational qualifications they had taken or were currently taking, formal or otherwise. In addition, the respondents were asked about their current status regarding further study (at home, college or university) or employment. In total 41 young people participated in this phase of research.

The following three tables summarise the responses made. The tables are divided into age specific cohorts (16 to 17, 18 to 20, 21 to 25) because it reflects the different transition points. More detailed tables are provided in Appendix 2 which offers a breakdown of each individual and their educational and employment trajectory. However, for the sake of clarity, the tables below are grouped according to age.

**Table 10.1 16-17 cohort**

16-17 yr olds	No. GCSEs		No. AS Levels		Other qualifications	Further study	Full-time employment
	1-4	5-10	1-4	5 and over	10	14	1
	6	4	3	0			
<b>Total: 15</b>							

As is evident, 10 respondents had taken GCSEs (or IGCSEs) which is 66% of the total sample (15). However, there was variation in the number of qualifications taken, with the majority (60%) taking one to four, rather than five and above. One of the reasons cited for not taking more GCSEs related to cost and finding exam centres that would accept external candidates (as mentioned previously). This may also explain why 50% of those studying for 5 GCSEs and above were enrolled in a school or college.

Nevertheless, this does not mean to say that respondents would necessarily have enrolled for more than four GCSEs if given the option because there was a noticeable sense of ambivalence regarding the need for five GCSEs and above. Respondents mentioned that 4 GCSEs is the minimum standard entry requirement for Colleges in England, as the following interview extract highlights:

I don't understand why the jump is so big. You only need four A-C grades to get into college so why do 11? There is just no point! Surely it would be better to focus in-depth on certain subjects than know bits of each. It's just a hoop jumping exercise isn't it? ... (**Carrie, young person**)

Thus, studying for more than four GCSEs was not seen as necessary or productive in terms of cost and time when pursuing alternative qualifications could offer equal or enhanced benefits. The diversity of qualifications pursued ranged from diplomas to BTECs to Open University short courses (66% of the sample favoured the Open University as a learning resource) and also echoes the variety of subjects studied from maths and physics to music and computing. Only one young person (Sarah) had no qualifications in this age group (formal or otherwise) because of issues with the funding of her GCSEs. Even so, she was in full-time employment as an au-pair and intended to use the money earned to train to be a gourmet chef at a local college.



**Table 10.2 18-20 cohort**

18-20 yr olds	No. GCSEs		No. AS/A Levels		Other qualifications	Further study	Full-time employment
	1-4	5-10	1-4	5 and over			
	6	4	7	0	7	15	3
<b>Total: 19</b>							

Table 10.2 also reveals that formal qualifications were pursued with 53% of the total sample having studied for GCSEs (or IGCSEs) and 37% of the sample having studied for or were studying for AS/A Levels. However, again there was a noticeable difference in the number of qualifications being studied for, particularly with regards to AS or A Levels with between one and four AS/A Levels being favoured by respondents. This may reflect the fact that three A Levels is generally the minimum university entry requirement and this was certainly substantiated by the sample. Fifty seven percent of those who had obtained or were studying for A/S or A Levels were working on the basis of gaining three A Levels with the direct purpose of going to university.

For those respondents who were attending university without A Levels, BTECs or National Diplomas were seen as offering alternative pathways to university. The subjects that were being pursued at university ranged from Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE) at the University of Oxford, to Outdoor Leadership at the University of Wolverhampton, to Humanities with Literature at the Open University. Thus, respondents were enrolled in a wide range of subjects at a variety of different institutions.

It is important to mention, however, that not all respondents wanted to go (or had attended) university (47% of the total sample), either because they wanted to pursue more vocational occupations at college (e.g. studying to be a tree surgeon or a chef), or because they felt it was not necessary as they could obtain 'real world' job

experience and not be in debt. Two respondents, for example, were self-employed in web design and one respondent was a full-time zoo keeper on the basis of the practical experience she obtained during EHE and her NVQ in Animal Management. There was only one respondent who was not in education, employment or training. He felt that he was under no pressure because he mentioned that he had wealthy parents and wanted to continue playing jazz music.

**Table 10.3 21-25 cohort**

21-25 yr olds	No. GCSEs		No. AS/A Levels		Other qualifications	Further study	Full-time employment
	1-4	5-10	1-4	5 and over			
	5	1	3	0			
<b>Total: 7</b>							

Table 10.3 focuses on the oldest age group: 21 to 25 year olds. Interestingly of all the age groups, this cohort had obtained more formal qualifications (86% GCSEs and 43% AS/A Levels). One of the reasons for this could be attributed to the time period when they were studied as respondents mentioned that access to exam centres was not as problematic as it is now due to funding cuts. In addition, over recent years there has been a rapid growth in online learning (e.g. online OU short courses) so invariably EHE young people have more choice, which in turn may have impacted the numbers enrolling for formal qualifications. In contrast, the number taking ‘other’ qualifications mirrored the sample generally (irrespective of age). In terms of further study and employment, respondents were also actively working towards or pursuing their career which involved either undertaking a degree, waiting to study for a post-graduate degree, or working in the NHS or retail industry.

In summary, the findings suggest that EHE young people are successful in terms of their academic achievements and accomplishments. Moreover, the success of respondents did not seem to be impeded by the number of formal qualifications obtained but rather their commitment and dedication to pursuing subjects of interest or gaining practical work-based skills. In many cases, this led to colleges or

universities accepting EHE students even if they did not have the desired entry requirements. As outlined by the following extracts:

I was only qualified to go onto a Level 1 NVQ in Public Services at college but because of my experience with Scouts and stuff I got onto Level 3 ... I got distinctions across all the modules and was top of my class. (**Rhianna, young person**)

Over the six years that I was home educated I had a few qualifications that I put together as evidence for my textile course. I realised that I had this massive portfolio and I showed it to them at my interview and they were like, 'Fine, you can come in'. There was no problem whatsoever. (**Scott, young person**)

However, there were exceptions to this rule particularly for subjects that were not vocationally orientated or affiliated to the Open University. Seven respondents out of the 32 enrolled in further study (22%) mentioned that they encountered difficulties accessing college or university courses.

## **10.2 Problems with access to further education**

Access to college and university was problematic for some EHE young people because of the strict entry requirements governing certain subject areas. The overwhelming consensus was that this was unfair, unjust and biased towards school children as the extracts below indicate:

I applied for A Levels but the college I wanted to attend declined on the basis of my GCSE points/grades. The 2 A Levels I wanted to do were computing and drama so I feel that I gained the best of both by going down the BTEC route. It would have been nice to do A Levels but I'm happy doing what I'm doing now. (**Olly, young person**)

Having only five GCSEs was challenging when I was applying to universities. I applied to Durham but I didn't get in despite also having two A Levels and a BTEC. I kind of feel the fact that I only got five GCSEs was a part of that because some people probably had the same grades as me but had ten GCSEs ... I definitely feel that home education is not viewed officially so they might not judge you fairly. So although you might know loads of stuff, generally people are interested in the qualifications. (**Edward, young person**)

EHE young people were in favour of admission procedures being adapted to accommodate applicants who do not follow a traditional school trajectory. Interviews or skills portfolios were proposed as ideas that could be utilised as it would allow applicants to prove themselves. Indeed, one respondent (Peter) mentioned that he only got accepted onto a foundation degree in computer science because he was given the opportunity to outline his academic skills, as the extract below highlights:

I was actually nearly not allowed on the foundation degree I'm doing in computer science. On the induction day when we were signing our course papers it asked for my GCSEs and previous qualifications and I just put none, home schooled. Then I got pulled aside and he said I didn't have the appropriate grades to get in and I'm like ok I can do 'this, this and this'. He got one of the tutors who works in the lab basically and he told the other tutor, 'Yes this guy knows what he is doing' and he just signed me off. I'm quite glad that they actually made the mistake to allow me to the induction day and then I was able to prove myself. **(Peter, young person)**

The issue surrounding access to college or university, however, was not the only problem faced by respondents. Adapting to and abiding by the rules and procedures of individual institutions was also regarded as a significant challenge.

### **10.3 Rules/regulations**

The extract below by Carrie is a case in point as it reveals her frustration at the perceived 'pointless' rules and regulations governing dress code:

Even at 16 when I went into sixth form it wasn't legal so you didn't have to go but it was so 'schoolified'. In fact the one time I bumped into the head teacher I was wearing jeans and the school code was to wear trousers. She said 'I should send you home for wearing those jeans' and I just looked at her and said, 'Well I am here'. I said 'It doesn't really matter what I am wearing but if you want to send me home then great because I would rather not be here at the moment'. She just looked at me and said, 'Go to your lesson'. I had a point, what is the point in sending me home from voluntary education if I was there to learn. **(Carrie, young person)**

For Carrie, abiding by a dress code seemed unnecessary and somewhat removed from the process of learning. While she did acknowledge that its purpose was to foster the

ethos of the school community she felt this was somewhat undermined by the head teacher's inability to respect the individuality of her students.

Further, adhering to institutional time structures and working collaboratively were also mentioned as points of contention.

## **10.4 Institutional processes**

There was a notable sense that making the transition from EHE to more institutionalised forms of learning is not always a smooth or easy process, particularly when one has become accustomed to the flexibility and freedom offered by EHE. This is echoed below:

If you are an autonomous home educator fitting into a structure is like fitting clay into a bad mould. I'm not sure how I am going to cope when I start college and have to deal with someone else's routine. (**Adam, young person**)

I also think with home education you are used to working within your own time frame and you are used to doing everything yourself. One of the things I have noticed about myself is when I am asked a question I automatically answer, irrelevant of other people in the room. I think it is because I was so used to having one-on-one time with my tutor. So I am not used to giving other people a chance. (**Edward, young person**)

Moreover, for some respondents (particularly autonomously educated young people) there was a general lack of awareness about how to engage with or fit into institutional or national frameworks when they were so used to working within and monitoring their own. For example:

When I started at university studying law I didn't have anything resembling an exam technique. I had done two exams beforehand and that was it. Also the university essay questions don't give you guidance so you have to try and work out what the tutor wants rather than write a good essay which I thought was what university was about ... There is a lot of subjectivity. (**Jessica, young person**)

Nonetheless, although there were evident issues regarding the transition from EHE to further education, respondents successfully adjusted over time and continued in

further education until the culmination of their studies (see Appendix 2 for detailed tables). The following extract summarises the responses made:

I found it fine. I guess it was a bit awkward at first having to abide by their rules and follow a set curriculum but after the first few months I settled in fine and made friends with the staff and teachers. I felt involved in the community. I didn't find college a shock or anything. I wanted to be there, so that obviously helps. (**Carly, young person**)

The difficult part, therefore, was adjusting to the academic or pastoral processes of the institution. However, once this had been achieved EHE young people were on the whole committed to positively developing or enhancing the community of which they were a member.

## **10.5 Involvement in college/university**

In fact some young people were of the opinion that they were better prepared for college or university than their schooled peers because their educational experiences had made them more adaptable and amenable to trying new things. The extracts below highlight this further:

My physics teacher was new to the college and he was just overworked and overstressed. He was a great guy and he knew his physics. He just didn't have the brain left ... I actually taught my A Level class the last chapter of physics because I wanted to do it and they knew I knew my stuff. That was quite fun. All the other students were hoping that my bit would come up because they thought I had taught it better. (**Geoff, young person**)

I won another award recently which was 'Contribution to Life at College'. I was Student President in my first year and Governor and Ambassador. I think it's because once you have been in education for so many years you do get quite detached from it or want to move on and get out, whereas I made the decision myself to be there; there is maturity in it. (**Alana, young person**)

In my law degree I was the only person alongside a lad from Romania that put myself forward to argue for or against a particular motion in front of 250 people in the lecture hall. There was only five minutes to read through it and then present ... I am a lot more confident to do things like that. I think it's because I was home educated ... Another thing is a lot of the time my friends won't go and talk to solicitors and they will drag me to go with them. I mean

come on these people are now 19 or 20 and they are not comfortable going up talking to a professional. They are happy to talk to lecturers but not a professional on their own. (**Jessica, young person**)

Literature on the outcomes of EHE also seems to suggest that home educated young people are successful, confident and motivated and pursue a wide range of careers. However, it is important to mention that literature on this area is under-researched and small scale in the UK. Webb's study (1999) is one of the most in-depth studies to date and was based on interviews with 20 EHE young people (in their twenties and thirties), a quarter of whom Webb (1999) first spoke to as teenagers in the early 1980s. The findings revealed that participants were overwhelmingly positive about their EHE experience and its impact more broadly on their sense of well-being and their chosen career paths. Similarly, Goymer's (2001) study (unpublished EdD thesis) with five EHE young people in Norfolk, who were sixteen and over, found that EHE young people were 'successful' and had a wide range of skills, both academic and practical. This was outlined succinctly by one respondent (Katie Stokes, 16):

After sixth-form I'm definitely going onto higher education, but as of yet I don't know if I'll go to college or do a degree in English. I'd like to be a journalist or writer of some kind... (p57).

The US, by contrast, has published many articles on the outcomes of home schooling which also outline the benefits of this provision, particularly in respect to academic outcomes. In 2004, the Journal of College Admission dedicated a full issue to the topic of home schooled students entering higher education. One of the articles published was by Jones and Gloeckner (2004) who conducted an empirical study to further determine differences between home school and traditional high school graduates.

The study used four dependent variables: grade point average (GPA); retention; ACT Test scores and credits earned (in their first year of college) to compare the first year academic performance of home school graduates and traditional high school graduates. The home schooled students (55) were identified by a transcript type or identification number and were then matched to a random sample of high school

graduates (53 public or private school graduates). The first phase of data collection included the ACT Composite Test scores and four subset scores (English, mathematics, reading, and science reasoning). Additionally, data was collected to determine first year academic performance measured by first year grade point average, retention and first year credit earned.

The results, though not statistically significant, revealed that the average first year GPAs, credits earned in the first year and ACT Composite Test (English, mathematics, reading and science reasoning) subsets for home school graduates were all higher than traditional high school graduates. The first year mean grade point average was 2.78 for home school graduates and 2.59 for traditional school students. In addition, home school graduates earned 23.85 credit hours compared to 22.69 credit hours earned in the first year for traditional high school graduates. Jones and Gloeckner (2004) concluded that, based on the results of the academic performance analyses, home school graduates are as ready for college as traditional high school graduates.

The positive results regarding the academic outcomes of homeschoolers was more recently outlined in Cogan's study (2010) which examined the academic outcomes of home schooled students from a private university in the Midwest (nearly 11,000). Of the student population, 76 students (1%) reported attending home school prior to enrolment. The descriptive analysis of the census data revealed that the sampled home schooled students possessed higher ACT scores, grade point averages (GPAs) and graduation rates when compared to traditionally educated students. In addition, multiple regression analysis results revealed that students who are home schooled earn higher first and fourth year GPAs when controlling for demographic, pre-college, engagement and first term academic factors. Further, binary logistic regression results indicated that there was no significant difference between home schooled students' fall-to-fall retention and four year graduation rates when compared to traditionally educated students while controlling for these same factors.

However, although the research available on outcomes tends to suggest that home schooled students perform similarly or above average academically when compared to



their traditionally schooled peers, the results do have to be treated with caution because of methodological flaws, unrepresentative samples and the bias of funding bodies (as mentioned previously).

### **10.5.1 Conclusion**

As is evident, investigating the outcomes of EHE is not a straightforward process because of methodological limitations and practical constraints which include the heterogeneity of the population and difficulties in obtaining adequate sample sizes. I certainly found this to be the case in my study and thus the results have to be treated with caution, in line with EHE research more generally. Nevertheless, the research I conducted into the outcomes of EHE is possibly the most comprehensive study in existence to date in England, certainly by an individual who is not affiliated to the EHE community. This could also be attributed to timing because I doubt that a decade ago I would have had as many participants in the age range of 16 to 25 because EHE only started to gain ground in the UK during the mid to late 1990s.

The findings provided here may go some way to help answer one of the most commonly held questions in home education research: ‘How does home education prepare young people for further education or the world of work?’ After all there has been extensive research conducted over the years into how school education prepares children for entering further education and employment in OECD countries and elsewhere (see Recruitment & Employment Confederation Report, 2010; Bowers, Sonnet and Bardone, 1999) but less is known about the outcomes for EHE young people. Unfortunately it was not within the scope of this study to assess what methods (i.e. structured/unstructured) produce the best academic outcomes, but as the responses revealed academic success was not the only benchmark for achievement.

Indeed, the consensus of opinion among the sample group was that their personal successes (e.g. public speaking/lifeguard certificates/art work) were just as important, if not more so than their academic achievements as through pursuing personal interests a wide range of skills could be fostered and developed. These were seen to

include, among others, initiative, self-motivation, and creative and critical thinking. The development of such skills and their transferable nature were regarded as imperative, if not essential for future success (in further education or the job market). Moreover, there was an acknowledgement that the growth in youth unemployment due to the world recession had meant that all individuals had to stand out and offer something exceptional, and qualifications alone were no longer enough. Nevertheless, there was an acknowledgement that qualifications were important for gaining 'access' to further education or employment and to a large extent this is why formal qualifications, particularly GCSEs and A Levels, were pursued. However, for a minority of young people there were considerable barriers to the access of formal qualifications, with financial concerns and a lack of knowledge of EHE among admission tutors being particularly pertinent. Such issues were seen to be par for the course for home educating young people, although they did not think it fair that they were disadvantaged for taking a different educational route than their schooled peers.

Recommendations for change and improvements in this area included the following: improved entry to exam centres, funding towards exam costs and the inclusion of home education in admission policies or procedures. However, literature in this area has revealed that barriers to access are not solely confined to the UK context. One of the largest studies conducted in the US on the perceptions of admission officers towards homeschoolers (159 institutions approached) found that the process could be improved, not only in terms of initial perception but with regard to the amount of hoops homeschoolers have to jump through in order to gain access compared to their schooled peers (Jones and Gloeckner, 2004). Thus, it can be argued that it is not only UK support structures for EHE young people that are in need of work, although comparatively the structures for accessing further education in the US are more transparent for homeschoolers.

Despite the limitations mentioned, however, it was apparent that the sample population were overwhelmingly positive or at the very least satisfied with their home education experience. This was attributed to 'opening up' new areas of study and giving them the confidence to follow career paths, some of which might not necessarily be viewed as 'conventional' or the 'norm'. Additionally, all of the

respondents (with the exception of one – who was playing jazz music) were in further education, employment or training.

This research, therefore, may go some way to help alleviate fears surrounding this provision, although I am aware that more research needs to be undertaken until such fears are allayed entirely. Nonetheless, what this research has made clear is the level of enthusiasm that the young people have for home education and how it has enriched their lives and shaped their current and future aspirations. This was poignantly outlined by one respondent who mentioned that home education ‘can’ and ‘does’ work, but as with anything it requires a lot of dedication and persistence by all those involved in order to truly reap the rewards:

... My cousin is 17 and my aunt wouldn't have ever thought of taking her out of school because we were all still being home educated. It was still: 'Oh let's see how that one turns out'. Now we are all quite successful and doing well in the choices that we have made and confident, happy people I think that has sort of empowered her a bit to think I want that for my son, who is six rather than the other. *I don't think she would have known that she could do it if it hadn't been for us. Not only know that she could do it, but know that it works.*  
(Carrie, young person)

The next section discusses how home education is perceived in society. It outlines the extent to which the broader public are aware of or understand EHE. In turn it provides further information about the experiences of families who are either currently pursuing this provision, or have done so in the past.

# 11 Chapter 11: Home educators/educatees' perception of EHE

## 11.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the perception of EHE from the viewpoint of home educators/educatees. First, the reaction of family members (i.e. partners/grandparents) to EHE is summarised because they usually are involved in the decision-making process or are the first to be informed of the decision. Thus, their views are of interest given their close proximity to respondents. Second, the broader societal context of EHE is explored with regards to awareness and understanding (or lack thereof) and the effect this has on EHE parents and their children.

## 11.2 Family reaction

The reaction of family members towards EHE was initially characterised by scepticism according to respondents, because it was perceived as being so different to the 'norm'. The follow extracts summarise the points made:

It was extremely hard at the beginning because even their dad disapproved, but Richie was in such a desperate situation I thought I am going to have to do it. He has definitely come around and seen how well these two are doing and the others are doing really well too ... (**Joy, parent**)

Initially my parents were a bit afraid because it is so different and my mum was a teacher her whole career so I think it was really difficult for her to see outside of that box and to think that there might be another way of doing things. She is now my greatest convert to home education ... (**Amanda, parent**)

The decision to EHE was not taken lightly by respondents because in many cases family members (and on occasions fathers of the children) were apprehensive about what EHE would involve and whether the children would actually be educated. This was in part due to a lack of awareness and understanding about EHE because for the majority of family members the school system was viewed as the one and only way to be educated. In addition, there was a mentality (particularly among grandparents) that

they ‘got through it’ and ‘survived’ and so should the child. The extracts below highlight this further:

They said, ‘You can’t do that; don’t give into her’. They were just against it. My family were in Devon so they don’t live close but immediately they wanted to come up and talk to Jennifer to see what they could do. The in-laws had a similar reaction ... It’s the generation as well; you go to school, that is what you do. (**Natasha, parent**)

Grandparents of people my age in particular spend a lot of time talking to you about exams. It is the primary question, ‘How are your exams going?’; ‘How is school?’ ... Not ‘How are you?’. So when mum said we were going to be home schooled I think they took it as a bit of an insult because you are sort of questioning what they did in a way ... (**Hannah, young person**)

While there was a degree of uncertainty about EHE among family members it is important to mention, however, that it did diminish over time (with many grandparents helping out with EHE). The extracts below highlight the comments made:

My grandma absolutely really didn’t like it. She told my mum that we were never going to get a good job but she apologised a few years later and said she’s so proud of where we have come ... She spent a lot of time with us at the end of the day and that helped change her mind about it. So she got proved wrong in the end. (**Siobhan, young person**)

My dad had quite a lot of pressure from my grandparents about the fact I wasn’t in school. They were really upset by it. They thought it was wrong and that it was damaging to me and irresponsible but they were kind of disproved by my GCSEs along with everything else I’ve done ... (**Geoff, young person**)

The lack of awareness and understanding about EHE was not solely confined to family members; their views were regarded as echoing societal reaction in general.

### **11.3 Societal reaction**

One of the main problems mentioned by respondents was confusion over the legal status of EHE, with the majority of people seemingly unaware that it is legal.

### 11.3.1 Ignorance over legal status

EHE as an educational alternative to school was questioned by members of the public. The extracts below by a parent, child and a young person outline the ignorance that persists in society:

You can have as I say people who don't realise it's legal at all. It is not at all uncommon if you take a child to a museum and people assume that they should be in school. It is sort of taken for granted. So I think in the wider community it isn't even realised that it is a possibility. **(Grace, parent)**

Most people I know at Cadets don't even know that it is legal or even exists really. I think it's because a lot of parents tell their children that it is illegal not to go to school so people think that those who are being home educated perhaps shouldn't be. **(Sophie, child)**

I remember once a receptionist said, 'Why aren't you in school?' I said, 'I am home educated' and she said, 'You can't do that, it must be illegal'. I think it is barely perceived. If you tell someone you very rarely get a positive reaction. **(Adam, young person)**

In the public consciousness schooling was seen to be the 'legal' way of educating and because EHE deviated from this respondents had to deal with the subsequent implications, which for the most part centred upon defending their educational choice, answering questions and dealing with stereotypes. The following extracts emphasise this further:

People ask a lot of questions and people don't understand it. Sometimes we don't mind but other days we get a few very not nice comments and you get tired of explaining. That's part of the reason why I was conscious early on about taking Jack out on his scooter at the front of the house when it wasn't dinner time or early morning in case someone said, 'Why isn't he at school?' **(Catherine, parent)**

I think generally when you tell people you are home educated they hit you with that barrage of questions: 'What about exams?' and 'What about socialisation?' There was another one wasn't there? Oh yes 'Is it legal?' They would hit you with those three questions while looking you up and down to see if you look any different [laughter]. **(Richie, young person)**

People see it as hippy, grow your own goat or hyper-hot house structure with no social interaction ... I think it is still portrayed as extreme; either one extreme or the other but it is not seen as a normal thing to do. (**Charlotte, parent**)

The public perception of EHE was regarded by respondents as being different from the reality. While EHE is undertaken for a wide variety of different reasons there was a sense that home educators in the public domain are seen as a homogenous group with similar character traits and motivations (as discussed earlier).

### **11.3.2 EHE and socialisation**

The stereotypes that surround EHE were seen to reinforce this view particularly with regards to comments made about the lack of socialisation. While respondents did acknowledge that there may be home educating children who lack social experiences, this was not the case for all home educating children. In the same way that not all school children desire the same level of social interaction as others. In fact, the consensus of opinion from respondents was that EHE fosters children who are more socially aware and adept than their schooled counterparts as they are free to pursue their own interests and develop relationships with people of all ages, as supported by the following comments:

I think that people who think that home educated kids aren't socialised are the ones whose kids are at school. I don't think anybody who knows and who has met home educated kids ever thinks that they are anything other than social. (**Dawn, parent**)

Everyone talks about home education and socialisation but it is 'real socialisation'. In school you are taught that you must speak to people who are the same age as you and don't address the teachers with anything other than 'Sir' or 'Miss' because they are not really interested in you, and don't speak to the people above you because they are just out of your league, and treat the people below you like they are the people below you. (**Carrie, young person**)

There is no age barrier within friendships in home education. That is why when I returned to school after six years of home education I tried to keep hold of the friendships I had made in different school productions that were in different years ... Whereas my friends wouldn't talk to those who were from

different years. I think that was a reflection of home education because why would age matter? (**Alana, young person**)

The issue of socialisation was regarded as a non-issue by the majority of respondents with many commenting that EHE actually facilitated social skills, rather than restricted them. This was primarily because children were not confined to a classroom with a teacher and their age-matched peers. The term ‘socialisation’ was, therefore, thought to be misrepresented by its association with EHE because arguments levelled against this provision were focused for the most part on peer interaction or day-to-day engagement. This also supports the view held by Whitney (1914, cited in Farris and Woodruff, 2000) who argues that ‘socialisation’ (derived from the Latin root ‘socius’) at its most fundamental level relates to the idea of how we learn to get along with others; there is nothing in the root of the word that implies a peer or an equal or someone of the identical age or status.

However, respondents were aware that this was not the view held in society generally because of comments made either directly or indirectly about the social capabilities of EHE children. One particular example related to an enquiry about an Open University course which ended badly because the admission tutor was ignorant about EHE, as explained below:

We were talking to the Open University and we had quite a negative response. It was a 10 credit course that Sophie wanted to do about Darwin and Evolution. The woman kept coming back to Sophie because she didn’t want to do GCSEs and she was saying basically what they tell you in school, that it is really important that you do GCSEs ... She also asked how Sophie would cope socially because at the OU they have people from all different backgrounds ... I actually complained in writing to the Open University. I have heard good things about the OU but I think it is just because we came across this one woman. So we were unlucky I guess but it really put Sophie off the OU. (**Lynn, parent**)

Although the example above was seen to be an exceptional occurrence, because the Open University is a widely used resource by home educators, it nevertheless occurred, and in turn impacted negatively on the parent and child’s perception of the Open University. The stereotypes that surround EHE, however, are not supported by literature on this area which makes the public perception of EHE all the more



interesting. In fact, existing evidence (primarily US based) suggests that EHE children are just as socially capable as their schooled peers (if not more so).

One of the most notable studies conducted was by Shyers (1992) because it was independent of home school organisations and included a control group (unlike the majority of home schooling research). It measured the self-concept of 140 children (70 home schooled and 70 traditionally schooled, aged eight and nine) as they played and worked together (matched according to age, race, gender, family size, socio-economic status and frequency of extracurricular activities). The trained observers who were unaware of whether the children were home or traditionally schooled found that home schooled children had significantly fewer behaviour problems when playing with mixed groups of children. The mean problem behaviour score of children attending conventional schools was more than eight times higher than that of home schooled children. The traditionally schooled children were described as ‘aggressive, loud, and competitive’. In contrast, the home schooled children were described as acting in friendly positive ways because they:

tended to play well together; co-operated in the group interaction activity, and ... when they ‘lost’ in the games they would often smile or otherwise indicate that it was ‘okay’ and continue to play ... (p194)

Other studies that have explored the socialisation of home school children have also revealed positive results (i.e. Mayberry and Knowles, 1989; Fogelman, 1991; Rudner, 1999; Ray, 1999). However, in line with EHE research more generally, the findings should be treated with caution because there are still far too many unanswered questions about home schooling and socialisation, some of which include:

- ‘What does socialisation within the home schooling family look like?’
- ‘Are parents meeting their own goals for their children’s social development?’
- ‘What are homeschooled children’s closest friendships like?’
- ‘Are homeschooled children more independent, open-minded, or self-controlled than other children?’
- ‘Are they better able to get along with people of all ages?’
- ‘Is their moral development more advanced?’
- ‘To what extent does their homeschooling experiences affect the kind of lives they lead?’ (Medlin, 2000)

If these questions are answered it may go some way to combating the stereotypes that surround EHE in public discourse and in public life. In my study, the stereotypes relating to EHE were largely seen to be facilitated by the media which supports existing literature (see Rothermel, 2003; Cogan, 2010).

### **11.3.3 Media representation promotes stereotypes**

The media, given its presence in society, from television, to newspapers, to the internet was regarded as influencing the perception of EHE, especially because of the general lack of public awareness about this area. This is summarised by the comments below:

Again, it is that media portrayal of home education. Most of the time you see home school families on the TV they are either very, very, weird or very posh. **(Edward, young person)**

I would like the BBC to stop portraying it in a weird light so that it always results in a bad plot line on Waterloo Road actually. I think documentaries on the whole are quite good but when they portray it in popular culture it is always really bad and you always have people trying to save you from home education and that is what sticks in peoples' consciousness. **(Jessica, young person)**

If they want a voice for home education they will go to some really way out hippy home educator who lives on a farm somewhere. Everyone's perception of what life is like is through the media these days and that influences how people see home education. **(Carrie, young person)**

More recently the Badman Review into EHE in England (2009) was viewed as impacting upon the public perception of EHE. However again, it was not seen as a fair or representative portrayal of the EHE community as a whole.

#### **11.3.3.1 Badman Review**

For the majority of respondents there were concerns or question marks over the purpose of the review and its subsequent evidence base. For example:

I think it was very biased and it was pre-planned. I just think it was awful ... It didn't open up debate. Well I mean it did because it was so bad everyone started talking about it but in itself it wasn't open to debate. It wasn't a fair review as it was not based on evidence. (**Charlotte, parent**)

It was sad really that it re-emphasised peoples' perceptions about home education rather than actually exploring what the realities were ... I think it was just the safeguarding thing isn't it. I mean LA inspectors could go into school and find 10 year olds that can't read so they can't judge you by those standards. They haven't really got any standards to judge you by. That is why home educators have problems and I suppose that is why it is seen as a grey area. (**Scarlett, young person**)

Even so, there were a minority of respondents who felt that while the Badman Review (2009) provoked controversy, as to some extent it reaffirmed stereotypes that did not mean to say that the Review was not needed or warranted as summarised by the extract below:

I didn't read all of it but from what I gathered I thought it was quite reasonable. There should be more check-ups on home education because we don't know who these children are and whether they are being taught or educated effectively. (**Carly, young person**)

Nevertheless, the fact that nothing came of the Badman Review (2009) regarding its recommended changes to practice (LA or otherwise) was seen as further evidence by the majority of respondents that the Review was flawed as a result of its safeguarding focus. Although timing was key as none of the proposed safeguarding recommendations survived the wash-up before the general election. While this was applauded by many in the community, there was also a notable sense of frustration about the time and resources spent on the review and the negative headlines that were generated as a result. These centred for the most part on safeguarding and educational concerns. The headlines below are a sample of the type of questions, comments or concerns that were raised about EHE during this period:

'Is the Government right to be concerned about home schooling?' (The Independent, 2009)

'Home education: Children more likely to become Neets' (TES, 2009)

Headlines such as these were regarded by respondents (primarily adults and young people) as sensationalising EHE either by reinforcing misconceptions or providing inaccurate information. Rarely, according to respondents was the reality of EHE portrayed, although there was an acknowledgement that the lack of information or research into EHE had hindered public perception in the UK. In contrast, media reports on home schooling in the US are generally more favourable, but again this could be because of the (estimated) size of the population and the number of research studies conducted. Indeed, the profile of home schooling in the US is such that the Senate decided to hold a ‘National Home Education Week’ in 2000 (Mcintyre-Bhatty, 2007).

It is important to mention, however, that while EHE was viewed by the sample as a polarising topic and one that can generate negative attention it would be misleading to suggest that the public perception of EHE was characterised entirely by negative stereotypes. Expressions of genuine interest were also levelled at EHE, either from children, parents or professionals as the extracts below highlight:

You get people who say: ‘Do you have any friends?’ and all that stuff. But then you get people who are genuinely really interested. (**Peter, young person**)

We were at a science and technology exhibition two weeks ago that was in Birmingham and I talked to a lot of teachers there as we were identified as home edders and it felt like their attitudes had changed. I’m really generalising ... but the teachers who were finding us wanted to know more and were realising that they had common ground with home ed parents because they were frustrated with the system ... I think there is a bit of a turning point, there is a rumbling. (**Mia, parent**)

### **11.3.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, EHE was certainly found to generate discussion and debate in the public arena, whether good or bad. Even so, there was an overwhelming consensus that the debates surrounding EHE were on the whole ill-informed, either due to ignorance or because they were based on outdated stereotypes. This was not seen as entirely surprising; however, because schooling is seen as the ‘norm’ in public life

and thus other educational alternatives are viewed with unease or a certain degree of suspicion. It may also explain why many family members were initially sceptical of or resistant to EHE at the outset, with the issue of socialisation being a particular cause for concern.

The stereotypes that exist around home education were, therefore, certainly seen to influence how it was perceived, not only by family members but in society more generally. For example, some parents mentioned that they were wary of letting their children play outside during school hours in case it raised questions, while others spoke about the criticism they received from personal friends or professionals when informing them of their decision to EHE.

The negative comments were again focused to a large extent on the issue of socialisation or the perceived lack of it given that EHE children have limited opportunities for peer interaction. While respondents did acknowledge this point they felt that peer interaction alone does not guarantee how social a person is or conversely how socially inept they are. In fact, the consensus of opinion was that EHE children experience ‘real’ socialisation because they engage with people of different age ranges rather than a specific age cohort as in school. EHE groups, for example, are rarely tailored to a specific age group (although younger children generally attend) and neither are home educating festivals where teens and young people camp alongside families with younger children.

Thus, where socialisation issues are concerned respondents were of the opinion that home educated children should not be the sole target for criticism because school socialisation poses its own problems and dilemmas, which to a large extent are ignored for the purpose of maintaining the status quo. These include rule by authority; passive acceptance – the discovery of knowledge is beyond the power of students; and that ‘feeling’ is a misplaced emotion in education because recall is the highest form of achievement (see, Illich, 1971; Reimer, 1971).

In contrast, home education was regarded by respondents as fostering and developing not just the ‘intellect’ but the ‘whole person’, of which social and moral development

is one part. However, there was an acknowledgment that unless further research is conducted into home education and socialisation it will remain a 'grey area' and EHE families will have to continue to deal with ignorant and ill-informed stereotypes. Additionally, opening up debate and dialogue on this area was seen as important because of the questions it poses for education more broadly: what does effective socialisation look like and what methods of education are best suited to achieving this goal?

As reflected by respondents in this study, the socialisation opportunities afforded by home education were seen to be more favourable than those provided by a school education. It would be interesting to see if further empirical based research with EHE children and young people support these views because currently such research is limited in the UK and it is one factor that may persuade or dissuade people from pursuing home education in the future.

The next section explores in further detail the changes respondents would like to see for EHE moving forward and their reasoning for this.

# **12 Chapter 12: Future of EHE**

## **12.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines what respondents would like to see for EHE moving forward. The following four themes were regarded as being particularly pertinent for EHE.

- Support for funding/resources
- LA training on EHE
- Research on EHE
- Wider awareness about EHE

The themes centred on support for EHE families (from resources to increased training for LA officials) and also greater public representation or awareness about EHE which facilitates genuine knowledge rather than hearsay or misinformation. These key themes are not surprising, however, because they have all been mentioned in previous chapters. Nonetheless, in this section they are explored in relation to the future of EHE specifically, in order to gauge how respondents would like to see EHE develop and progress in the UK and the possible likelihood of such change.

First, support for funding/resources is discussed because the financial pressure of EHE was noted as one of the (if not the main) limitation of EHE.

## **12.2 Support for funding/resources**

It was clear from the majority of respondents that funding for exams (e.g. GCSEs) would be useful. As mentioned previously, there is no funding for families who want to pursue GCSEs or A Levels outside of a school or college, or alternatively to take them early. In addition, funding for activities from sports to game sessions was mentioned as an area which could help to enhance the learning experiences of EHE children. Young people in particular stressed the importance of group activities to help build confidence and self-esteem. In some cases young people took the initiative to start EHE groups or clubs themselves because of the lack of opportunity to engage in certain activities or because they wanted to share their interests with other young people. The following extracts summarise the points made:

I'd like to see more activities bought in, not even other sports but games sessions and people getting together to do quirky things ... Not to light my own fire but I think what I have done with teaching fencing has actually helped that group of people, just bringing the children together. I mean there are some children who have never encountered anything competitive before. **(Issac, young person)**

The other thing is I did a lot of board games called war gaming like War Hammer and all that. It was great because I used to run a club on Sunday because I wanted to share my interest with others. It was a great way of meeting people too. **(Edward, young person)**

However, although extra funding for exams or activities was regarded as noteworthy, respondents (primarily parents and young people) wanted funding on their terms. They did not want government restrictions or guarantees placed on the funding. The following extracts highlight the concerns surrounding funding for EHE:

I think if you gave a clear cut question to any home educator, if the government put no strings attached money into your bank account would you be happy the answer would be yes. But if you say do you want government funding? It is a completely different question because it comes with everything attached to it. I mean even for the government's sake it would be easier to regulate if they created resources rather than giving money. **(Scarlett, young person)**

... I think if there was funding there would be strings attached. Looking at my friend in Canada who has just registered her 12 year old she has already begun to regret it because there is absolutely no give in the structure. **(Joy, parent)**

Thus, funding for EHE was a contentious issue. While respondents did acknowledge that funding for exams or resources would help limit financial pressure on home educators they were also wary of the possible implications of such funding. This is why the ideal scenario was one where families who want to take GCSEs could access funding by contacting their LA. Similarly, for families who want extra resources, which include access to a school science laboratory or sport/art facilities, the consensus was that there should be a way of making these available. Although, given the current economic crisis respondents did acknowledge that funding for exams was unlikely to change any time soon.



However, where possible changes or improvements could be made to the facilities available to EHE families because in many cases it just requires support and co-operation from LAs and schools. A more collaborative partnership between LAs and home educating families was, therefore, thought to be necessary for EHE moving forward. Even so, there were concerns voiced by parents about the lack of knowledge of LA officials in respect to EHE (as mentioned earlier) because EHE was rarely their only role.

## **12.3LA training on EHE**

Training of LA officials on EHE was thought to be of paramount importance because of the diversity of the community and the stereotypes that still persist around home educators and EHE more generally. While there was a minority of home educators who were happy or satisfied with the level of knowledge and support provided by their LA, for many there was a sense that improvements could be made. The extracts below emphasise this further:

I don't think they are trained in home education and I'm unsure if many of them know the law ... I also believe that some of them who do know the law ignore it if they think they can get away with it. I mean I got left with a list of instructions about resources that I didn't need. (**Margaret, grandparent**)

... I don't think that the LA is looking out for the education of home educated children and that is borne out by having the conversation with the LA officer yesterday. The college had asked her what level Emma was at and she didn't know. Yet she has been visiting us every year except the first year when someone else was in post. (**Dawn, parent**)

Thus in many instances parents who were willing to engage with and have a dialogue with their LA felt let down or frustrated by their knowledge of EHE or of their child and their capabilities. It may also explain why there was a general lack of enthusiasm for LA information days (if proposed or conducted by a LA) as emphasised by the following extract:

My LA set up an information day to get all the families registered with them together but just us and one other family turned up. They had people there

from different areas; IT people were there and people from Parent Partnership but I've heard nothing since. (**Natasha, parent**)

Increased training for LA officials was seen as one way of sustaining and improving relations between LAs and EHE families, not only on a one-to-one level but also within the wider community. Nevertheless, it will take the resolve of both sides to make it work. From my own experiences of the political faction of the EHE community (either via online groups or attendance at HESFES) there will certainly be opposition to any attempts to strengthen links between LA and EHE families. However, from the responses of parents in this study there is certainly a desire for more support which includes accessing work experience placements to contacting exam centres. There is a basis for collaboration but whether it works in practice remains to be seen.

## **12.4 Research on EHE**

The lack of research on EHE was seen as another notable issue by respondents (parents and young people) not only from a public perception perspective but also because the vast majority were interested in finding out about the numbers and characteristics of home educating families and the outcomes of EHE. The extracts below summarise the points made:

One of the things I would like to know statistically and one of the things the Badman Review made me think about was that they didn't have any real statistics about us at all, about anything. We reckon that it is 1% of the school age population that is currently home educated but we have no idea how many people have been home educated in total. (**Joy, parent**)

It would be interesting to know wouldn't it whether there are any families out there whose parents have been in prison and who home educate their families? Do the criminal classes bother? Do people with non-societal moral standards actually bother to home educate their kids and I wouldn't have thought it very likely. (**Margaret, grandparent**)

I think researching outcomes for home educated children is really interesting and I would like to do research on that in the future. I think it is hard to assess what people do. I'm not really doing a good job of describing what my education was because most of my education was sitting round reading stuff, arguing with people and talking with people. That's what I did but I don't

think everyone goes about it the same ways and yet it is the outcomes that matter. (**Lauren, young person**)

As highlighted by the above extracts, research on EHE was thought to be both topical and timely because of the lack of information in this area and anecdotal evidence which suggests EHE numbers are growing, fuelled in part by the increased growth in technology (see Gaither, 2009). The Ofsted Report into EHE (2010) also suggested that more research was needed on EHE because understanding of the most basic questions is limited: ‘What has been striking about the Badman Review is the dearth of information on home educated children in England, not least basic data about the number of these children’ (p3).

Further inquiry was thought to be necessary if parents are to make informed decisions regarding the education of their children. It is important to mention, however, that not all respondents were interested in research that was specifically focused on uncovering the demographic profile of EHE families, because they were wary of what the data would be used for and why. Nonetheless, there was a general acknowledgement that more research would help to raise the status and profile of EHE and in turn foster a greater awareness about this provision.

## **12.5 Greater awareness**

It was clear from the sample that EHE should be provided as a valid option for parents and children to consider alongside school education. The extracts below outline the comments made:

I think it should be a lot more public and that parents are told as part of the package when children are tiny that it is a valid option and how to make contact with the networks. (**Mia, parent**)

I do think it is overlooked so it would be good if more people were aware of it or saw it as an option. I think people should know that there is more than one way to learn. I think because people just assume that going to school is what everyone does. (**Edward, young person**)

Providing alternative options to mainstream schooling was seen as important because it would help to enhance knowledge and awareness about EHE. Additionally, it would give families a choice about the different educational practices that are available and to work out what is best suited to their child. Certainly, the growth in technology over the last decade was regarded by respondents as strengthening the case for EHE and other forms of 'alternative' learning (i.e. virtual schools) because a wide range of resources can be utilised via the internet and it can be used as an educational and social tool. For example:

It has become so much easier to do home education with the internet. The amount of material you can get and the many different angles that you can see things from that teachers don't always have the time to do ... I am also part of EHE groups that I contacted on the internet and we swap ideas and so forth ...

**(Pippa, parent)**

I am coming to the conclusion really that if you have got a computer you can teach children an awful lot of stuff and you don't have to pay for very much ... with the internet you can access over 1000 video tutorials on maths, science you name it. It is there and it is free. The US resources are particularly good so we use some of them. **(Joy, parent)**

The internet was seen as a way of not only facilitating the practice of home education but also in many ways was a tool that enabled families to become aware of this provision, to contact families with mutual interests or to seek advice both in the UK and abroad. This is perhaps why the internet was viewed so highly by respondents because it was multipurpose, time and cost effective, and accessible.

### **12.5.1 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the future of EHE was viewed positively by respondents with the majority maintaining that they are happy to continue pursuing EHE or indeed EHE themselves in the future. This was despite the financial limitations of EHE and the general lack of support provided (although as the responses indicated change was desired). More widely there was a notable sense of optimism about the growth and development of EHE characterised in no small part by the advancement in technology.

This also echoes the views of researchers who have mentioned that the advent of technology has made home education a far more feasible option both practically and financially (see Stevens, 2003; Monk, 2004; Thomas and Pattison, 2007). For example, Monk (2004) argue that it is not implausible to suggest that the increase in home education through the use of the internet might reflect a radically new form of childhood: ‘... historians of the future may talk of schooling as a form of mass education not as an end point of a progressive narrative but rather, as a relatively short social experiment’ (p597). Whether this happens is open to debate and I certainly would not like to be drawn either way given the lack of research on this area.

Nevertheless, what was clear from my own findings was the significant role technology played in EHE both as a learning resource and as a way of contacting and liaising with EHE families. It is also highly doubtful that this research would have been possible without the internet because by and large this was the method used to find out about EHE events or contact respondents. Another interesting research project could focus on the impact of technology on EHE families and upon the movement more widely. This would be useful as it could explore further how technology is utilised by EHE families and the extent to which the internet facilitates awareness of EHE or creates spaces where ideas and resources are shared.

The next section provides concluding comments and discusses the possible implications of this research.

## Section six

### The Discussion

# **13 Chapter 13: Conclusions and implications**

## **13.1 Introduction**

This chapter returns to the research questions originally set out in Chapter 1 and uses them as a framework for reviewing the results of this study and some of the implications arising for future research.

The research questions are reiterated below:

1. Why is home education undertaken by families?
2. How is home education practised?
3. What are the experiences of parents, children and young people who have been or are currently engaged in this provision?
4. What are the outcomes for home educated young people concerning qualifications and employment?
5. What are the views of parents, children and young people regarding how home education is perceived in society?
6. What changes would parents, children and young people like to see for home education moving forward?

## **13.2 Researching EHE**

Before discussing the findings of the study it is worth drawing attention to what set this study apart from previous work conducted in this area. As mentioned previously, I was not home educated nor am I a home educator so the research questions and methods developed from the literature I accessed and the groups and families I was involved with. In contrast, most of the research in this area, both in the UK and worldwide is conducted by home educators or home educatees who generally have a set research agenda from the start because, as with all topic areas, access is generally easier if you are a member of the community and have knowledge of the area. This is especially true if sensitive or under-researched areas are involved which is the case with home education. The ‘insider/outsider’ rationale, therefore, certainly played a part in how this study played out because I was conscious of getting out into the field early on and meeting and talking to people. In hindsight this was the best thing I could have done because it helped to inform the direction of my PhD and the methods used.

This leads onto the second and perhaps most crucial distinction or difference between my research and that of others: the inclusion of children and young people's views and of child-centred methods. Although I was concerned with ascertaining parents' views because I thought they had much to offer the research (previous UK research has tended to focus primarily on motivations for EHE (see Rothermel, 2002/03; Morton, 2010)), I also realised that including children and young people's views was important. This was not only because it would set my research apart from others in the field but also because my involvement and interaction with EHE children and young people had made me aware that their experiences should be documented and recorded.

In summary, my research study on home education is arguably different from what has gone before. I have no personal or professional affiliations to the home educated community. I also sought to address gaps in EHE research by focusing on particular areas of interest (i.e. the nature of EHE/outcomes) and by ascertaining the views and experiences of a cross section of participants that included children and young people, given that they are particularly under-represented in UK EHE research.

However, as revealed in the discussion below concerning how the research questions were answered, this study identified far more theoretical and philosophical questions than there were answers. This should not be seen as all that surprising given the nature of the topic and the lack of research on this area. Nevertheless, understanding what this thesis uncovered both in terms of the results obtained and the subsequent questions identified might be of benefit to future researchers in this field and in the field of education more broadly.

### **13.3 Research areas**

The first question that my study sought to answer concerned motivations for EHE

1. Why is home education undertaken by families?

As mentioned previously, the motivations for EHE have been researched quite extensively in home education research compared to other areas. Nevertheless, this



question was included, not only as a means of providing an overview of the rationale for EHE among the sample group but also to uncover the views of children and young people alongside parents, because in the main parents' views have taken precedence.

The findings were broadly similar, irrespective of the age of the respondents sampled and were focused predominately around dissatisfaction with the school environment/system which included bullying, failure of schools to recognise or cater for a child's SEN (including gifted and talented provision) and the inadequacies of the National Curriculum. Thus, home education was rarely undertaken as a lifestyle choice or for religious reasons, although there were exceptions (see Chapter 7) and this echoes previous research on motivations for EHE (see Rothermel, 2002/2003; Morton, 2010).

What was also clear from the responses provided was how much children and young people were involved in the decision to EHE; it was certainly not forced upon them without due consideration. While parents for the most part made their children aware of EHE as an educational option, it was the child who ultimately decided whether it was the best option for them. This led to debates and discussions around rights and responsibilities in education, which was an unexpected but beneficial outcome of the research question under investigation.

Parents in particular spoke at great length about their commitment to exercise their right to educate and this was supported by the children and young people. It was perceived as being both a democratic and human right, although the decision to EHE was undertaken primarily by participants for personal rather than political reasons at the outset. However, having said this, once the decision to EHE had been made there was certainly a shift in attitudes towards the value of school education and its social and political function.

Moreover, it was not only adults who questioned the innate purpose and value of school education but also children and young people were quite vocal about the suitability of the learning and educational opportunities afforded by schools. In contrast, home education was perceived as opening up new horizons because it

facilitated new ways of knowing and new ways of being. Previous research has also alluded to the various kinds of sentiments, pedagogies and feelings that can be derived from the discovery of and/or decision to EHE (see Lees, 2011).

In summary, the decision to EHE, while not undertaken as a 'lifestyle choice' by the vast majority of respondents, was in many ways realised through the process of its discovery which allowed parents to exercise their right to educate their child in the way they saw fit. More broadly, this led to philosophical questions and ideas being raised about the level and acceptability of state education when compared to the involvement of parents.

It would be unfair to say that the sample group were against formal education per se, which is evidenced by the number of young people particularly pursuing further education in colleges or university, but rather recommendations for change were expressed with regard to school education. Such changes included greater provision and support for SEN children, broader learning practices to take into account individual children and a more diverse curriculum among others. This is somewhat unsurprising given that for many respondents the decision to EHE was a result of dissatisfaction with the school system.

Nonetheless, despite the recommendations made there was a consensus among respondents that even if these changes occurred it was unlikely that they could ever consider a time when they would want to enrol or re-enrol their children in a school. There were certainly no regrets expressed about the decision to EHE, rather the opposite: they all expressed a commitment in their own small way to promoting awareness of home education, whether among family members, their community or elsewhere, and perhaps being part of this thesis was also one way of realising this aim.

The second research question focused on the nature of EHE practice:

## 2. How is home education practised?

Here, I was interested in finding out about the practices and activities pursued by home educating families on a day-to-day basis in order to gain a broader understanding of how children learn and the tools used. Previous research studies conducted in this area have predominately used sub-categories (the first of which were established by Van Galen, 1988) to help identify the motivations and associated practices of home educators (see also Thomas and Pattison, 2007). Perhaps the three most commonly known are autonomous, structured and semi-structured, although there are variations in the terms used. I wanted to find out whether these terms were useful for defining the EHE practice witnessed and the extent to which they were used by home educating families themselves.

As mentioned previously, the findings indicated that while some home educated families can be attributed to or do align themselves with certain categories, this is more of the exception than the rule. For the most part home educating families utilise methods and approaches both in and outside of the home that suit the child, rather than getting the child to 'fit' a certain approach or way of learning. This means that in one family a child could be following a structured way of learning (although this rarely replicates school at home) while another child could be carrying out a research project either independently or as part of a group.

Thus, association with or preference for a particular way of learning did not impede experimentation and this was particularly the case among long-term home educators, rather than those who were newly home educating. This could be attributed to long-term home educators being more confident in their abilities, because understandably those relatively new to home education were more concerned or worried about getting it wrong and inadvertently damaging their children. In addition, long-term home educators generally had established resource or support networks which also had a bearing on the levels of confidence shown or willingness to try new techniques. Moving forward then, rather than trying to 'fit' home educators into existing categories it might be more useful to ask whether these categories actually help in summarising the practices pursued or whether they are more of a hindrance. Certainly in my case, the categories mentioned were useful in providing markers to understanding home education practice, which is why they were utilised in this thesis.

But at the same time they also posed problems as the categories are not mutually exclusive, they overlap and evolve over time.

The need to quantify or categorise home education practice should, therefore, be approached cautiously because as revealed in this study not all home educators associate with or want to be associated with a particular approach. For many the beauty or charm of home education is in the opportunity it provides to be innovative, creative, original and visionary, among others, which in many cases transcends the need or use for predetermined labels.

The third research question focused on the impact of home education upon families, specifically its benefits and disadvantages:

3. What are the experiences of parents, children and young people who have been or are currently engaged in this provision?

This question was interested in providing a wider insight and overview into the experiences of home educating families, because in effect it was prompting respondents to think and reflect upon the value of home education and the extent to which it could be improved. The results revealed that home education has both benefits and disadvantages but for the sake of clarity each one will be discussed in turn.

In terms of the benefits of home education the quality of educational development and personal growth took precedence over all others. The flexibility to pursue interests, adapt learning styles, travel and come to know one self was perceived as being key to the success of home education. Moreover, it was not only children and young people who revelled in the experiences provided by home education: parents also found that home education offered personal enrichment and gave them a fresh outlook on learning and life. In a sense it opened up new ways of learning and thinking about the world and fundamentally their position within it.

As a result some respondents (primarily parents and young people) questioned whether ‘home education’ was a suitable and/or effective term to describe the lived experiences or realities of home educating families, given that the ‘home’ was not necessarily the central point of learning or discovery. Instead, the term ‘world education’ was proposed by some respondents as a more fitting description to the one currently in use because it emphasises clearly that education can take place anytime, anywhere and anyhow. In a sense it is not constrained to a particular time period or a specific locality (as in a school) but rather the opposite, as home educated families can utilise the numerous resources at their disposal, from the internet to home education support networks.

Despite the cited benefits of home education, however, it was not without its disadvantages which in the main focused upon the inadequacies of funding for exams and access to appropriate services. While a minority of respondents (parents) were cautious about state involvement or funding for home education, the majority of respondents did want to see greater knowledge about EHE among professionals (i.e. LA EHE officers) and service providers, and improved access to work experience placements, exam centres and SEN provision. This was particularly pronounced among parents and young people.

In summary, the experiences of the home educating community were on the whole positive particularly in terms of the educational experiences afforded, but nonetheless changes were proposed to the terminology used to describe home education and the way in which support and access to educational and pastoral services could be improved. Existing research has also outlined the need for improved support for home educating families (see Badman, 2009; Parsons and Lewis, 2010) but I am not aware of other research studies in home education or elsewhere that have identified or proposed changing the word ‘home education’ for ‘world education’ because of its broader meaning and outlook.

On reflection this could be useful, not only for those within the home educating community who believe that the term ‘world education’ encompasses the diversity of learning environments or practices pursued, but also for academics writing about this

subject, because at present there is no one generally accepted term to describe education at home. In the UK 'home education' is common place but it is referred to as 'home schooling' in the US or 'home learning' in the Netherlands, among others. The unofficial term used by some of my sample group could, therefore, perhaps pave the way for a new way of defining home education and its associated practices, both in the UK and abroad.

The fourth research question sought to ascertain the outcomes of EHE:

4. What are the outcomes for home educated young people concerning qualifications and employment?

This question was included in the thesis because unlike the various reports and studies conducted into the outcomes of school education (see Chapter 10), little is known about the outcomes of home education in the UK and how it prepares young people for further education or the world of work. In contrast, there have been numerous studies conducted in this area in the US and for the most part positive findings have been reported (see Rudner, 1999; Ray, 2003). Uncovering the educational or career trajectory of UK home educated young people was thus perceived as an area of topical and timely importance.

The findings from the sample population aged from 16 to 25 (41 respondents in total) revealed that all of the respondents with the exception of one were in further education, employment or training (although the majority of the sample group were pursuing further study given the age range sampled). In regards to further study, the courses pursued (e.g. Law/Outdoor Leadership) and institutions attended (Oxford University/Open University) were as diverse as they were interesting and this also reflected the different sensibilities of the sample group. The Open University, however, was favoured by the vast majority of respondents as it offered enrolment for short courses from the age of 14 and reduced tuition fees for degree level study.

For a minority of respondents access to further or higher education was a major issue because of the lack of formal qualifications obtained, due in part to cost or because

respondents did not see the need or purpose in pursuing GCSEs or A Levels. The failure of admission tutors and institutions (the Open University being the exception) to recognise or indeed consider ‘alternative’ or vocationally orientated qualifications (including Open University courses and BTECs) was thus regarded as a significant point of contention. For the vast majority of respondents their personal successes and accomplishments were just as important as their academic achievements, if not more so because of the variety of life skills fostered and developed.

Nonetheless, the focus on academic skills and qualifications as evidenced by college and university admission procedures were not viewed as all that surprising given that in schools academic pursuits take precedence over vocational areas of study. The separation between disciplines and the way in which subjects are compartmentalised led to questions been raised about the extent to which formal schooling prepares young people for 21<sup>st</sup> century life. Tellingly, the questions raised here are not new but have been echoed by employers, academics, business leaders and government advisors in the UK and worldwide.

For example, a nationwide survey of UK employers (the first survey of its kind) in 2011 revealed that only 16% thought that young people had the right mix of practical and academic skills and more than 80% thought students would benefit from studying vocational subjects alongside academic ones (see UKCES, 2011). Leading academic Professor Alison Wolf also expressed concerns about the ‘educational apartheid’ that has plagued Britain in a review of vocational education conducted on behalf of the government (DfE, 2011). In a similar vein Eric Schmidt, Chairman of Google, warned educationalists and school leaders in the MacTaggart Lecture (2011) of the importance of valuing practical and experimental education in schools if they are to keep pace with new technologies and industries, many of which are yet to be invented:

The UK is the home of so many media-related inventions. You invented photography, you invented TV. You invented computers in both concept and practice. Yet today, none of the world’s leading exponents in these fields are from the UK ... Of course there is no simple fix but I have a few suggestions ... First you need to bring art and science back together. Think back to the

glory days of the Victorian era. It was a time when the same people wrote poetry and built bridges ... Over the past century the UK has stopped nurturing its polymaths. (The Guardian, 2011, p8)

Thus, it could be argued that home education rather than school education actually helps to develop and promote many of the skills that are valued and needed in the workplace today. These include motivation, confidence, initiative, innovation and foresight, to name a few. Certainly, among the respondents sampled there was a sense that home education was beneficial to their educational and personal trajectory because it allowed them to develop as people and to discover their abilities, interests and aptitudes. The only barrier to success in the main was the institutional barriers that impeded access to further education courses and institutions.

However, despite the struggles encountered regarding access to further study there was a notable absence of regret at the path taken: for the vast majority of respondents home education had reaffirmed the value of education and its place in their lives. This is perhaps why none of the respondents in this study expressed an interest in pursuing a career as a school teacher although many other careers, educational and otherwise, were outlined (one respondent was a self-employed home education tutor).

The outcomes of home education are, therefore, difficult to quantify despite my best efforts because they are not solely related to the number or level of qualifications taken, grades attained and the careers pursued, but rather the impact home education has had and continues to have on individuals both on an educational and personal level. Consequently, it is hoped that this research will lead to further questions being asked about the nature of this provision and whether lessons can be learnt from its successes in order to help the next generation of children, whether they be educated at home or in school to reach their education or employment goals.

The fifth research question sought to ascertain the views of the sample group regarding the societal perception of EHE.

5. What are the views of parents, children and young people regarding how home education is perceived in society?



The perception of EHE in the public arena was seen as a topical area of interest given the recent Badman Review into EHE (2009). Thus, respondents were asked for their opinions regarding the level of awareness and understanding of EHE in society and the impact it had on their day-to-day lives.

The findings revealed that EHE is characterised for the most part by ignorance in society because schooling is seen as the 'norm'. Consequently, home education is viewed with a certain degree of suspicion or unease as it is seen to challenge the status quo. While respondents did appreciate that school education is the reality for many families, which may influence how it is viewed, there was also a notable sense of frustration at the stereotypes that persist around this provision. The stereotypes surrounding EHE were seen to be facilitated in no small part by media coverage on this area and in particular the sensationalised nature of the reports. For example, the issue of socialisation was seen to dominate coverage on EHE for the purpose of generating headlines, which on the whole were perceived to be negative and not constructive for home education or the families involved.

The Badman Review (2009) was also a source of contention among respondents, primarily because it was seen to reinforce stereotypes rather than ameliorate them. For the majority of parents and young people it was viewed as an affront to home education because of the way in which the Review was conducted, from its focus on safeguarding to the lack of evidence collected. The consensus of opinion was that the Review could have been worthwhile if framed differently, but as it was misapprehensions about EHE were seen to be facilitated instead of genuine knowledge. Moreover, the headlines that were generated as a result were rarely regarded as being supportive of or sympathetic to home education and the home educating community. Indeed, some respondents found headlines post-Badman to be inflammatory and divisive.

In particular, comments levelled at the socialisation skills of home educated children were found to be unfair as respondents mentioned that school socialisation also poses problems due to children being in a self-contained building with their peers for eight hours a day. In fact, the consensus of opinion among the respondents was that the

socialisation experienced by home educated children was more natural and akin to daily life.

To conclude, therefore, home educating families had to deal with a variety of stereotypes, many of which were seen to be unfounded because of ignorance and/or lack of awareness. The issue of socialisation and its association with EHE was a particular source of contention for respondents because of the implication that home educated children lack socialisation opportunities. While there was acknowledgement that home educated children do not interact as closely with their peers as school children, other socialisation opportunities were afforded from participation in EHE groups to conversations with adults.

Thus, the question over EHE and socialisation was regarded by respondents as a contentious issue mainly because it serves to conflate peer socialisation with socialisation per se and they are two entirely different things. Future research on EHE should, therefore, bear this in mind because, as evidenced by my research, effective socialisation is not a product of constant engagement but is more to do with the ease and quality of that engagement in whatever environment it takes place.

The last research question focused on the type of improvements that could be made for the benefit of home education practice or provision:

6. What changes would parents', children and young people like to see for home education moving forward?

This question is important because it seeks to address the pertinent issues that are apparent in home education practice or provision and how they can be improved for the benefit of those currently involved and in the future.

The findings revealed that increased funding or support from public services would be advantageous for home educating families. This includes funding for formal exams (GCSEs and A Levels) as currently parents have to pay approximately £200 per exam. For some young people the financial cost of exams was a significant barrier to access and this meant that formal qualifications were not pursued or only a limited number

could be taken. The consensus of opinion among the young people sampled was that the current situation was unfair and unjust because in many ways the school system had failed them but they were in effect been penalised again by having to pay for exams.

However, having said that there were concerns expressed about how the funding would be distributed and whether there would be government restrictions placed on the funding. This is why the majority of respondents (parents and young people) favoured a scenario where LAs had access to the funds and could distribute them accordingly, given that not all young people wanted to take formal exams or desired a collaborative relationship with their LA. In the main this was because of the lack of knowledge of EHE among LAs. Increased training for LA officials was seen as another area where change was warranted and this was supported by young people and parents alike because of the benefits it could potentially offer with regards to access to public services and facilities. For example, schools, youth clubs and universities were seen as three options where facilities could be extended to home educating families when not in use. The lack of access to specialised equipment (e.g. wood work/art tools) or access to work experience placements was seen as a limitation of EHE, particularly among children and young people, so this was perceived as one way forward. Also, previous research conducted in the US has suggested that developing partnerships with schools or other educational institutions (e.g. colleges) offers various advantages for home educating families (see Ray, 2003; Hanna, 2011).

Greater awareness of EHE among public service providers or in society generally was seen as another point for change. One way respondents thought that the profile of home education could be promoted was by increasing research output in this area and through marketing material so that parents are aware in the child's early years that home education is a legal and valid alternative to school education. In that way parents can make an informed choice based on the evidence available about what educational route would best suit their child and can plan accordingly.

In conclusion, changes in the way home education is viewed, funded and supported were particular points of concern and were deemed worthy of further investigation. In

many ways the respondents sampled had come to accept the limited support on offer, whether it related to access to services (exams/facilities) or funding, but they thought it could and should be improved for future home educated children and their families. This is especially since in UK legislation and government policy (Children's Act, 2004, Every Child Matters, 2003) there is a commitment to ensuring that 'all' children regardless of background or circumstance have the opportunity to achieve to the best of their abilities.

There was a consensus among the sample group, however, that such legislation and policies were devoid of any substance or conviction because they are focused largely on school children and make little provision for those children who are educated outside of mainstream education. Moving forward, perhaps it is time government officials took note of home education and sought to improve services because they are arguably not keeping pace with the requirements of this community.

Even prior to the world recession, home educated families had little support from LAs or other service providers and thus lack of funding should not be seen as a convenient excuse to oppose the changes required. This is especially since in many cases greater networking and collaboration could solve many of the problems stated. Whether changes will occur is open to debate but as is evident home educators are resourceful and despite their circumstances I have no doubt that they will continue to rise to the challenge.

### **13.4 Implications of the study**

This section considers the theoretical and philosophical contributions that this study has made to the knowledge and understanding of an under-researched area and the implications posed as a result. First, EHE is discussed in relation to the discourses surrounding education and schooling, and questions whether the current value placed on traditional forms of education are misguided or ill-informed. Second, the status or standing of EHE in society is assessed from a point of fairness given issues concerning its discovery, to access to services.

### **13.4.1 Implications for education and schooling**

In dominant discourses on education globally schooling and education are often seen as one and the same. It is more or less forgotten that schooling historically is a relatively recent form of education and there are other options. This is because for the most part schooling is automatically assumed to be good for learners and society despite the essentials of schooling having not altered significantly since its origins. This thesis in many ways questions the value of school education and its relevance to 21<sup>st</sup> century life by focusing on an area of education that has arguably been marginalised by society. It is nevertheless gaining in popularity worldwide, fuelled in part by dissatisfaction with mainstream schooling.

Ironically, the new wave or interest in home education is a consequence of the perceived failure of the school system to accommodate the individual learning needs of children or to address problems of bullying by teachers or peers. Moreover, as evidenced in this thesis, once the decision to home educate has been taken the majority of children do not return to mainstream schooling because the advantages of home education are seen to out-way any negatives. The advantages include participatory modes of decision making, from learning methods to curriculum design and the flexibility to adapt techniques to suit the individual rather than having to follow a uniform ‘one size fits all’ approach, as in school.

I am aware, however, that not all home education practice is good, just as not all school practice is bad, but this thesis has revealed the innovative and accessible ways that children can learn, if given the time and space to do this, and the enjoyment, confidence and self-esteem that is afforded as a result. In addition, this thesis has challenged some of the widely held assumptions regarding home education by making reference to its outcomes, with a focus on the issue of socialisation.

In summary, it is hoped that these findings will give confidence to parents, children, educationalists and government advisors alike that home education can and does work if the commitment to succeed is there. It is certainly not an easy option but for many families the rewards accomplished are worth the hardships faced. The successes of

home education also leads to broader philosophical questions being raised about the kind of education system western countries are seeking to promote through schooling and whether in fact home education can offer a genuine alternative.

The advances in technology over the last 20 years have certainly helped home education as technology can be used to inform learning and it can be pursued anywhere. It is in many ways reflective of 21<sup>st</sup> century life where iPhones, tablets and laptop computers are part of the culture for the majority of individuals (particularly teenagers) because information is readily available at the press of a button (see Hansen *et al*, 2012; Shields and Behrman, 2000). In contrast, schooling has remained largely unchanged since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

While I am not suggesting that schools have served their purpose and should be replaced, I am proposing that the current curricula and teaching methods used in schools should be reconstructed in the direction of an education that is more genuine and democratic in nature, as seen in home education practice. I am also not alone in voicing such concerns because numerous educational theorists (see Harber, 2009; Meighan, 2004) and reviews conducted into education in the UK (The Plowden Report CASE, 1967; Cambridge Primary Review, 2009) have similarly argued for a more child-centred approach to education and learning. I am aware, however, that reconstruction is not necessarily an easy task because it involves time and effort on behalf of all those involved. Nevertheless, I hope that this thesis will contribute in some small way to the existing calls for change in schools with regards to democratic education and personalised learning. The findings of this study have after all revealed that putting the child at the heart of the educational process can offer rich rewards if given the chance.

### **13.4.2 Wider implications**

This section considers the implications of this study which go beyond the influence of education and schooling to the position of home education in society more broadly. As highlighted above, issues are evident with regards to parity in knowledge between home education and school education despite both being legal options. This raises

questions of equity with regards to access both in term of its discovery and resources, given that educational choice literature and information policy on education is predominately school focused.

It was clear from the sample group (particularly parents and young people) that government sources and literature need to make people aware that EHE is a genuine option and make provision for home educated children in line with statutory legislation (Every Child Matters, 2003; Children's Act, 2004). This includes better knowledge of EHE among LAs, funding for examinations where required and access to specialist knowledge or facilities. Moreover, the transition point from EHE to further or higher education was perceived as needing work due to insufficient administration and support systems for home educated young people. In some instances this led to home educated young people being unable to pursue courses or attend particular institutions because no provision was made for home education in admissions criteria.

In summary, the inclusion of home education in government information and institutional policies needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency because, as evidenced by this study, not all children are able to cope or flourish in school. Thus, provision should be made for 'all' children regardless of educational trajectory. At present it can be argued that the government is failing in its duties to protect 'all' children from harm because in the vast majority of home education cases children are initially forced to go to school, despite significant emotional or mental distress, as it is seen as the only option. Greater awareness about EHE as a legal alternative to schooling could help remedy this situation. In addition, improved procedures and protocols for home education monitoring and support are required because they currently lack rigour and effectiveness.

The next section discusses the areas of future research identified by this study.

## **13.5Future research**

The findings of this thesis have helped to clarify the areas that are in need of additional research, either because there is no research available or it is limited.

At present there is no national database on EHE children and they are not included in the Pupil Level Annual Schools Census (PLASC) or the National Pupil Database (NPD). A detailed examination of the figures that currently exist on EHE and the quality of the data would be beneficial for the purpose of providing an insight into what is known about EHE nationally (regional, socio-economic and ethnic trends). It could also be used as a precursor to predict future developments in the EHE movement.

The information available from government sources on EHE also needs to be improved if it is to become an accessible option and be effectively supported by public services. As evidenced in this study, there was a lack of awareness about EHE as a legal alternative to school education because in educational literature generally school education takes precedence. Future research could, therefore, examine the effectiveness of educational literature or campaigns for creating awareness of EHE and the implications this could pose for EHE families in terms of helping to reduce stereotypes, the opening up of schools or youth clubs for the purpose of utilising specialist facilities and the accessibility of institutional support structures for EHE young people who want to pursue further study.

The role of the internet in EHE discovery and as a tool for learning also warrants further investigation. It was clear from my study that the internet was a valuable resource because it provided information on EHE, offered networking opportunities and opened up new ways of learning. It would be useful to examine in more detail the extent to which the internet has helped to aid the discovery of EHE and in what ways the internet is used by families as an educational and learning resource.

Lastly, the academic and social outcomes of EHE are another important research area, not only for home educating families but also for educationalist, academics and government advisors more generally, because assessing the outcomes of education is



useful for providing insight into its quality and for determining future success. This study revealed positive academic and social outcomes of home education. However, the lack of a control group meant that comparisons could not be made between the academic or social successes of home educated children compared to school children (although this was not my intention). Future research in the UK could seek to address this by following the lead of the US where control groups have been used for decades in order to measure outcomes (see Chang-Martin *et al* 2011; Shyers, 1992). Until research of this nature is conducted in the UK there will always be a question mark over the effectiveness of EHE and its viability as a ‘real’ educational alternative to school.

The research areas mentioned above could without doubt keep numerous researchers occupied for a considerable time – let alone a single doctoral candidate who has merely begun to identify topical and timely issues for the future.

## **13.6 Final words**

Do not go where the path may lead. Go, instead, where there is no path and leave a trail. (Strode, 1903, p505)

In conclusion, researching home education has been rather like carrying a pail of water across rocky and rough terrain. It required stamina, self-belief, determination and above all else a sense of hope that the task could be achieved. The origins of this journey through to its culmination are documented in this thesis from the literature review through to the methods design and the analysis of the results. Whether this thesis creates impact or has any bearing on educational policy or practice in the future remains to be seen. I recognise that while this study has strengths it also has limitations as no study is without flaws or imperfections (see Berliner, 2002; Stake, 1995).

The strengths as I see them relate to the inclusion of children and young people’s perspectives on home education because they have often been overlooked in research in this area. Further, the trajectory of young people post-EHE was another interesting area for exploration and one that has rarely been touched upon in UK research before.

I acknowledge that this has something to do with the timing of this study given the growth of EHE over the last two decades. In regards to the limitations of the study the participants who took part were predominately recruited from EHE groups or web forums and thus were 'visible' to a researcher like myself. It could be argued that the home educators and educatees who took part did so because they wanted to showcase their skills and capabilities or reinforce the benefits of this provision. However, given the difficulties of accessing the sample group I had limited options available and I am unsure how another recruitment process would have worked in practice or achieved a better outcome.

Despite the limitations of this thesis it is nonetheless hoped that the research discussed and critiqued here has contributed in some small way to the knowledge and understanding of an under-researched area and identified possible areas for future research.

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# 15 Appendices

## 15.1 Appendix 1

**Table 15.1 Demographic Information: Parents and Guardians**

Numbers	Name	Gender	Residence	Family Type	Children/dependents	Employment
1	Margaret	F	Midlands	Grandparent	2	Retired lawyer
2	Charlotte	F	Midlands	Single parent	4	Runs her own home education consultancy business
3	Paul	M	South	Married	2	Freelance writer for newspapers/written a book on EHE
4	Joy	F	Midlands	Married	6	Full-time home educator. Used to be a Psychiatric nurse
5	Grace	F	North	Widowed	5	Currently doing an MA in Social Work
6	Dawn	F	Midlands	Married	2	Full-time home educator. Used to be an analyst for the National Grid
7	Pippa	F	North	Single parent	1	Owns translation business
8	Samantha	F	South	Single parent	2	Freelance copy-editor
9	Amanda	F	Midlands	Married	4	Full-time home educator
10	Lynn	F	Midlands	Married	2	Full-time home educator
11	Catherine	F	Midlands	Married	1	Full-time home educator
12	Natasha	F	Midlands	Married	2	Full-time home educator
13	Julie	F	South	Married	1	Co-owns and runs a farm
14	Kate	F	South	Unknown	5	Full-time home educator
15	Mia	F	South	Single parent	2	Freelance Journalist

## 15.2 Appendix 2

**Table 15.2 16-17 cohort**

Number	Name	Age	Formal qualifications	Other qualifications	Current status	Aspirations
1	Sarah	16	0		Au-pair	Intends to start a chef professional development course
2	Luke	16	7 GCSEs		Studying for 5 A Levels	Pursue a career in politics or economics
3	Aaron	16	4 GCSEs	Grade 5 classical guitar		Study for A Levels
4	Lucas	16	9 GCSEs		Studying for 4 A Levels	Unsure
5	Max	16	4 GCSEs		Going to college to study computing/engineering	Career in computing/engineering
6	Henry	16	0	OU short courses	OU short courses	Degree in Maths and computing
7	Cameroon	17	5 GCSEs		BTEC in performing arts	Career in the performing arts
8	Nathan	17	5 GCSEs	Level one Maths	OU short courses	Might go to college
9	Hannah	17	1 IGCSE	OU short courses	OU short courses.	Intends to be a writer
10	Jamie	17	0	OU short courses/Level one Fencing Coach	Studying for Maths and English GCSEs	Study Maths and Physics A Levels.
11	Archie	17	4 GCSEs	Level 2 BTEC in Music	Continuing BTEC music course	Go to university/get a job
12	Ollie	17	4 GCSEs	Drama qualifications	First year of Computing BTEC	Go into computing or drama.
13	Clare	17	4 GCSEs	Level 3 Psychology	Studying for 4 A Levels	Journalism or counselling
14	Jack	17	0	OU short courses	OU short courses	Degree in engineering
15	Adam	17	0	OU courses	OU courses	Unsure



**Table 15.3 18-20 cohort**

<b>Number</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Formal qualifications</b>	<b>Other qualifications</b>	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>Aspirations</b>
<b>1</b>	Geoff	18	5 GCSEs and 4 A Levels	-----	Taking a gap year	Intends to do a degree in Theoretical Physics
<b>2</b>	Lauren	18	4 GCSEs; 2 A Levels	Studying for a Maths and Statistics degree at the OU	Private tutor of Maths for EHE children	Politician or researcher
<b>3</b>	Rhianna	18	0	Level 3 BTEC in Public Services/Level One Adult numeracy and Literacy	Waiting to start university	Degree in Outdoor Leadership
<b>4</b>	Carly	18	8 IGCSEs and 4 A Levels	-----	Waiting to start university	Studying PPE at Oxford University
<b>5</b>	Edward	18	5GCSEs/two A Levels and a BTEC	-----	First year of a degree in English Language and Creative Writing	Full-time novelist
<b>6</b>	Patrick	18	0	National Diploma in IT	Currently plays Jazz	Unsure
<b>7</b>	Liam	18	4 GCSEs	-----	Studying to become a tree surgeon	Tree Surgeon
<b>8</b>	Tom	18	4 GCSEs	-----	Last year of Music course at college	Apply to university to study Music
<b>9</b>	George	18	0	-----	Last year of BTEC in Hospitality	Intends to be a Chef
<b>10</b>	Alana	18	9 GCSEs and 3 AS Levels	-----	Studying for A Levels	Study for a degree in Geography and International Development
<b>11</b>	Finley	19	0	-----	Fourth year, Animal Management	Animal/diary technician
<b>12</b>	Mary	19	0	-----	Third year of BTEC in public health	Intends to be a Paramedic

13	Caroline	19	9 GCSEs and 3 A Levels	-----	Support worker	Physiotherapy at university
14	Leanne	19	4 GCSEs	Level 2 NVQ in Animal Management	Zoo Keeper	
15	Jessica	19	0	OU short courses	Second year of a Law degree	Lawyer
16	Richie	20	4 IGCSEs	-----	Retail assistant	Interested in 3D modelling and animation
17	Issac	20	5 GCSEs	-----	Last year of OU degree: Humanities with Literature	Study for A Levels in Chemistry and Biosciences. Work full-time in entomology
18	Peter	20	0	Level 3 BTEC in ICT	Self-employed (webbusiness)	Computer Science degree
19	Scott	20	4 GCSEs and 1 A Level	BTEC in Web Design	Self-employed – web design	Expand business

**Table 15.4 21-25 cohort**

Number	Name	Age	Formal qualifications	Other qualifications	Current status	Aspirations
1	Riley	21	2 GCSEs	Plumbing and First Aid	Temping	Join the Police force
2	Connor	21	0	ICT qualification	Full time job in ICT	Progress in the family business
3	Jacob	21	5 GCSEs and 3 A Levels	German and Japanese courses	Retail assistant	Become an actor
4	Siobhan	21	2 GCSEs	Level 2 Health and Social Care; Level 3 Childcare and Education	Studying for a BSc Childhood and Education	Travelling. Unsure after that.
5	Becki	23	1 GCSE and I AS Level	Adult numeracy and literacy	Studying hair and beauty	Textiles or design
6	Scarlet	23	4 GCSEs	NVQ and a BA degree in Education	Waiting to study for a Masters	Become a Social Worker
7	Carrie	25	3 GCSEs/ 3 A Levels	-----	NHS officer	Pursue career

## 15.3 Appendix 3

### Interview Schedule: Parent/guardians

#### Background

1. Prior to home educating what job did you do?

#### Reasons for home education

2. Why did you decide to home educate?

Prompt: Was there a particular reason?

Prompt: Was it a family decision?

Prompt: How did you find out about home education?

#### Nature of home education

3. Who is most involved in facilitating the child's learning?

Prompt: Is it a collective family effort or does one parent take charge?

Probe: How does this impact on the day to day dynamics of family life?

Prompt: How much say does a child have in terms of what they learn and when?

Prompt: How involved are grandparents or other family members?

4. What approach do you use?

Prompt: Where did you hear about that approach?

Prompt: Why do you use that approach?

5. What resources do you use?

Prompt: Do you follow a specific curriculum?

Prompt: How does technology inform the activities or learning pursued?

Prompt: Do you think the resources available for home educating families are sufficient?

Probe: Is there anything else you would like to add about this area?

6. Have your methods changed over time, or are they similar?

Prompt: Are your methods informed by the child's capabilities/interests?

Probe: Do you think you use more innovative approaches to learning than teachers in school?

## Different approaches

7. Are home educators generally supportive of each other's approaches?

Prompt: Are you aware or have you encountered any disagreements or criticisms as a result of the approach pursued?

## Access to home education groups/social interests

8. Have you founded or are you a member of any home education groups?

Prompt: Why did you decide to set up a home education group?

Probe: Could you say more about this process?

Prompt: How long have you been a member of a group?

Prompt: Where did you find out about it?

Prompt: What are the main reasons for attending?

Prompt: Do you think it has enhanced your home education practice?

Probe: Could you say more about your participation in the group?

9. What are your views about the debates around home education and socialisation?

Prompt: Do you think lack of socialisation is a cause for concern for home educated young people?

Prompt: How do you promote socialisation opportunities?

Probe: Is there anything you would like to add about this topic?

## Society reaction/media perception

10. Were family members supportive of your decision to home educate?

Prompt: What was the initial reaction to the news?

Prompt: How has this changed over time?

11. How do you think home education is perceived in society?

Prompt: Do you think people have preconceived ideas about home education?

Probe: Where does this come from?

## Badman Review

12. What are your views on the Badman Review?

Prompt: Do you think the review was needed?

Prompt: Do you think the review provided a representative overview of EHE?

Prompt: Were you involved in any way in the consultation process?

Probe: Do you want to say more about this area?

### Benefits/disadvantages of EHE

13. What do you think are the benefits of home education?

Probe: Have you noticed a difference in the child's behaviour/enjoyment of learning?

Probe: To what extent has it impacted family bonds?

14. What do you think are the disadvantages of home education?

Prompt: Is access to funding/resources an issue?

Probe: How could this be improved?

### Turning the tables

15. If you were asked to summarise what home education is in a sentence what would you say?

16. How would you like to see home education develop in the future?

Prompt: What recommendations would you like to propose for home education moving forward?

Prompt: Do you think home education is going to increase in popularity?

Probe: To what extent do you think technology will impact the growth of home education?

### Other comments

17. Are there any further comments you would like to make in relation to this research study?

## 15.4Appendix 4

### Interview Schedule: Children/young people

*The interview schedule was the same for children and young people with the exception of questions on outcomes and the Badman Review (See Chapter 6).*

#### Background information

1. How old are you?
2. How long have you been home educated?

Prompt: Did you attend school prior to been home educated?

#### Reasons for home education

3. Why are you home educated?

Prompt: Was there a particular reason?

Prompt: Was it a family decision?

Prompt: How did you find out about home education?

#### Nature of home education

4. What is your daily routine?

Prompt? Is your routine similar day to day or does it vary?

Probe: How does it vary?

Prompt: Does learning take place mainly in the home?

Probe: Where do you learn the most? (House/outside – museums etc)

Prompt: Who is the main facilitator of your learning?

5. What do you think you couldn't be without in terms of learning at home

Prompt: Do you use books/internet?

Prompt: Are there any additional resources that you think could aid your learning?

6. What subjects are you interested in?

Probe: Why are you interested in those subjects?

Prompt: Are there any subjects that you enjoy doing now that you didn't previously?

Probe: Why do you think that is?

### Similarities/differences to school

7. How do you think your learning environment differs from a school?

Probe: Explore teacher/student relationship and environment

8. Do you think you learn better at home than you would do at school?

Probe: Why do you think that is?

9. What do you think are the benefits and disadvantages of your environment?

Probe: Explore socialisation issues/hobbies/interests

Prompt: Would you change anything about your home education environment?

### Social interests

10. What social activities/groups do you engage in?

Prompt: How often do you participate?

Prompt: What do you gain from attending the activities/groups in question?

Prompt: What is the age range of the group?

11. Do you feel you are missing out on any social opportunities as a result of being home educated?

Prompt: Would you like to take part in more social activities?

Prompt: Are you a member of any social networking sites?

### Society reaction/media perception

12. How do your family members feel about you being home educated?

Prompt: Were you aware of your family's reaction to the news?

Probe: How has this changed over time?

13. How do you think home education is perceived in society?

Prompt: Do you think people have preconceived ideas about home education?

Probe: Where does this come from?

Prompt: Are you open about the fact you are home educated to people outside your immediate social circle?

### Benefits/disadvantages of home education

14. What do you think are the benefits of home education?

Probe: Explore learning approaches/family relationships

15. What do you think are the disadvantages of home education?

Probe: Explore access to resources/socialisation opportunities

### Future goals

16. What are your plans for the future?

Prompt: Do you think you will remain being home educated?

Probe: What are the reasons for this?

Prompt: If aged over the age of 16 what are your intentions in terms of further study/employment?

Probe: Do you think the transition from home education to formal education or employment will be a challenge?

### Other comments

17. Are there any further comments you would like to make in relation to this research?



## 15.5 Appendix 5

### Task-based activities:

*The following information was provided to children as a guideline for participation.*

#### Personal narrative

Write a short story about what it is like to be taught at home. For example you could include:

- What activities or subjects you enjoy (i.e. swimming/history)
- The items/resources that you use in home education (i.e. books/internet)
- Days out that you feel were useful to your learning (i.e. museums/parks/holidays)
- Who you learn with

You can draw a picture too if you feel that would help describe your experience of home education.

#### Photo collage

Compile a photo collage (either together or separately) about your home education experience and include descriptions about what the photos represent. This can include photos of the following:

- Home education environment (house/garden/pets)
- Daily routine (Do you use certain items every day – a desk/chair? or a computer?)
- Social activities (i.e. swimming/horse riding)
- Places/events visited in the UK and abroad (i.e. museums/parks)

## 15.6 Appendix 6

### **Example of a themed and annotated interview transcript** **(Dawn)**

**(Annotated comments are made in bold and points of interest are highlighted in Italics)**

#### **Reasons**

Researcher - Why did you decide to home educate?

Dawn – The initial reason I looked into it was that Emma was in Year 2 and the school called me in and said they had done an assessment of her and they got an individual education plan for her and that it was really bad that she wasn't achieving what she needed to achieve. They said they were going to give her 20 minutes a week with a group of six. So she would be one of a group of six who were going out and they were going to take her SATS scores out of the average. They would make her sit her SATS but they thought she would do badly as she couldn't even write her name at that point. Once I realised that she had been to school until Year 2 and she couldn't even write her name and they weren't going to do anything about it, I thought she would be hitting on junior school level and still not be able to do the basic things so that made me look into home education.

#### **Dissatisfaction with schooling – SEN**

Researcher – If she had more one to one support would you have kept her in school?

D – Possibly. If one to one support had happened earlier in her school life....She could barely write and her reading age wasn't age appropriate.

#### **EHE was not a 'true choice' – push factors – Refer to Parsons and Lewis's article (2010)**

R – When did your other child come out?

D – He was in nursery. I took Emma out in the Easter so she didn't have to sit her SATS because that was stressing her. She was awake until 3.00 in the morning worrying about doing a test, so she was very aware even at 6, and she is a summer baby so she wasn't 7....Mike was still at the nursery at the school so her carried on and that was a challenge taking Emma to pick her brother up every day for two terms. She had already got a place at the junior school for the following September and she had the choice whether to go to school or not and she chose to go. We reviewed it after one term of the first year and by the Christmas I knew it wasn't working. *She had actually improved so much been at home for two terms that when she went into*

*the junior school she miraculously didn't have any special needs.* They assessed her and said she didn't need any extra support so they wouldn't have taken her SATS scores out of the average at that point, and all we had done at home was basic work books for only two hours a day while Mike was at nursery.

**Example of benefits of individualised learning – See Fortune-Wood (2006)**

### EHE approach

R – Do you use a particular approach for home education?

D – We are quite *structured*. I do a list of activities of different things that they have to do. They each have a sheet for the week of the activities for each day.

R – So is that English, Maths and Science?

D – Yes, we do Latin as well. We try and follow the *classical curriculum* and they each play a musical instrument....Emma plays the piano and Mike plays the guitar. So they have a music tutor on a Wednesday. I mainly follow *Susan Wise Bauer's* classical curriculum....There is a lot of literature that you read to them and they read to themselves and mainly the classical literature, not the modern stuff and penmanship; handwriting and we do separate grammar lessons.

R – Are you the one who facilitates their learning?

D – Yes

R – How is the day planned out?

D – Everyone has to be up and dressed, have their breakfast and *ready to work by 9.30am*; that is the rule. We have a set of family rules as well so that it all happens. Then they work till whenever they are finished because they have each got their own list of activities and now they are older they can work independently on some of things. It's up to them to come and ask for my help on things they need help on. On a Wednesday that is when the music tutor comes and Wednesdays also tends to be a Latin and English grammar day. That is the day I am more involved with them. I feel like I need more of an input.

R – When you started home education were your methods the same?

D – *No, it changed over time.* When I first came out I brought all the National Curriculum work books and I just let them work through what they would have been working through if they were at school. Then we naturally moved to a bit of autonomy in that we were doing more unit studies and more project based work. We were following their interests and then I was getting the literacy and the numeracy in with that and that I found quite high maintenance really. Then when I was diagnosed with Cancer that clearly wasn't going to work so we went back to the rigid approach....

**Interesting – methods changed over time – Became slightly more autonomous – supports literature (Thomas and Pattison, 2007)**

R – Why did you decide to follow the Classical Curriculum?

I had already researched the classical element of it but I hadn't implemented that by 2006. So after I had the Cancer and got back to full strength then I decided that was the way to work. One of the reasons was that it was difficult to ask other people to work with them if there was no structure to it. It was easy on my good weeks to say: 'They need to do this book on this day and on this page'. On my good weeks I could plan it and on my not so good weeks other people could implement it....Also not to beat around the bush there was a period when I thought I wasn't going to survive very long and I really thought they would have to go to school. *With autonomous education it is the long term isn't it?* You are looking at the long term and actually after having a Cancer diagnosis you don't really have a long term perspective it has got to be different; they might need to go back to school because if I am not around to do it or not well enough to do it consistently then they need to go back to school.

**Structured education was more convenient at the time – family circumstance**

Qualifications

R -Would you consider sending Emma back to school for GCSEs or would you try and do the IGCSEs?

D – IGCSEs wouldn't be fair for her to do because she has memory issues anyway. All the things she had on her IEP when she came out of school haven't gone away. It's just we can manage them better.

R – Would you like them to do formal qualifications?

D – No, not necessarily. *I don't think formal qualifications are necessary for everything that they might want to do.* It has been nice that Emma has decided that she wants to do something down the equine studies route because it has given her a focus. It is not that I want her to get GCSEs to prove how well I have home educated her because that isn't what I want to do....In fact when I was thinking that Emma might have to go back to school to do the courses that she wants to do I was gutted because I thought that would be so negative due to the problem we were having with Warwickshire College. *They were dismissing us because of their blinkered opinion that home education meant excluded....*Not that she wouldn't cope because I am sure she would cope perfectly well at school now but it is just not what I would want for her....

**EHE – mistaken for exclusion – link to section on perception of EHE**

R – So the schools are funding the children?

D – Yes, the schools are paying the college £35 a day for the equestrian course and we will pay the same. It just works out over the two years about £3,000.

R – Would you like more funding for home education? **More of an issue for secondary level**

D – I was quite happy up until secondary level. In primary level I was quite happy not to have any money because then there were no strings attached and it gave me the freedom to do what I wanted and follow the curriculum I wanted. *At secondary level you are starting to look at colleges and further education and jobs and things so you are conscious that you have got to jump through certain hoops.* The problem I have is jumping through the hoops without any funding. It's like if you need this outcome you need to do X,Y and Z and to do X,Y and Z costs money....The books and resources and things are much more expensive the older they get....I would like funding that would kick in at age 11....*It's not just the funding for GCSEs. It's where the examination centre is and what exams they have to sit.* If they have to sit IGCSEs exams it is not actually a level playing field because the kids at school have sat coursework GCSEs which are much easier aren't they? IGCSEs are a straight 3 hour exam paper, and the exam centre could be miles away; Preston or Bristol or somewhere. It isn't actually fair that a home schooled kid has to sit a three hour paper and get up at 5.00 in the morning to travel there before they sit the three hour paper. I know some home schooled groups have sorted it out and they have got exam centres close to home and they have got funding for the kids. I know we could do GCSE Maths and English at our local college but that's just Maths and English.

**Issues with exam centres – noted as a disadvantage of EHE – travel/cost**

R – Would they be able to enter it at 14?

D – Yes they can if they have the LA person saying that you have been home educated and you are not a pushy parent getting your kids to do more exams. I think that was the issue.

R – So basically you will play it by ear and see what happens along the way?

D – Whatever she needs to go further is what we will do. I know there are some universities and things that accept Open University credits and *I love Open University and I would like for her to do that.* If the college that I want her to go to and where she wants to go won't accept those qualifications there is no point doing it, is there?

**Reference to Open University – link with Joy's experiences – not all families had positive impression of Open University though – mention Sophie (child)**

### Perception of EHE

R – Do you think people are aware of home education?

D – I think you need to come across home education in order for it to be flagged up. I don't think it is something that you would necessarily know about if you weren't doing it or knew anyone who was doing it....I think it was in the news because of

Badman but it has gone quiet of late....When you say you are home educating people look at you like you have got six heads. *Then they usually ask me if I am a teacher and if it is legal and do they have to take exams.* Then all the time they are doing that they are usually looking the kids up and down to see if they look any different.

### **Ignorance – common questions – legality/accredited teacher status**

R - Were family members supportive of your decision to home educate?

Family reaction

D – They were a bit sceptical because it was too radically different for anyone to comprehend. Bizarrely enough my mum said that one of the reasons she worried about me taking the kids out of school was that it was all down to me and that if I was ill that their education would suffer, bless her. Not long after that I got diagnosed with Cancer and I was fairly ill really. *Other family members were just worried that they would be stuck at home and not see anyone or go anywhere and just literally be hot housed, stuck in a house and grilled.* At the time Emma was in school she was selective mute so she didn't talk anyway. She rarely spoke to family members if she could get away with it and was painfully shy and hid behind me and hung onto my leg. So I think they just thought it would get worse.

### **Perception of EHE – confined to the home – socialisation skills – Emma lacked confidence in school – thought it would get worse....**

#### EHE group

R – How long have you known Joy and been part of this group?

D – I think we met seven years ago at Kings Heath Park in the summer. So that was 2005.

R – Do you go to other EHE groups?

D – I just started at that *sailing* one yesterday. The kids are a similar age to mine and slightly older.

R – So where is that based?

D – They do it at Edgbaston or Upton Warren, but meeting with Joy every week has been the only real contact. Occasionally you know on *HELM* there are different activities and days out and if something is going on and it works with what we are doing at the time then I will go, but I don't go to everything that is organised. I am picky and choosy about what I go to. I don't regularly see other home educators....

#### **\*HELM – yahoo group\***

R - Can you tell me a bit more about the groups?

D - Emma goes to the Church youth club but Mike isn't old enough although he is desperate to go. Ok, let me run through the week: Monday, Mike goes to Scouts; Tuesday, Emma goes to youth club; Wednesday they have their music tutor; Thursday Emma goes to Guides and Friday they both go to Solihull swimming club; Saturday, Mike was doing karate but I think he is going to stop that. Then they do pony club but Mike is going to stop that and the sailing club once a month. There is a home education group that do ice skating once a month as well. They also go to Church on a Sunday and they have groups with that who they meet up with socially....

#### **Overview of week – participate in various groups**

R - So the groups you attend aren't solely made up of home educated children?

D - *We have never just met with home educated kids* and I think some families just make a decision to meet with home educated kids and they don't have anything to do with kids in school and that I think is where you can get isolated. We don't have the luxury either....*I think in Solihull there are 12 families* the last time I counted **(limited number of EHE families' in local area, anecdotal)**. *Some of those families have private tutors* so I can't rely on only meeting up with home educated kids because there just aren't that many of them around. I think we are the only family home educating in the three villages that covers quite a big chunk of Solihull. There are other families within Solihull and further towards Birmingham but not close enough that we could rely on them as the kids' main social circle. So it's meant that Emma and Mike have had to come to terms with been different in the groups that they are in. *So they have to be confident to say they are home educated....*

R – So you feel that it helps having someone to talk to?

D - You can still be isolated in a home education community if you are surrounded by parents who do things differently....I found that other people haven't coped with the fact that I'm too structured. If you meet up with people who don't do anything structured then I think they feel threatened....So although you are home educating you are following different paths....

#### **Different EHE approaches – structured vs. autonomous**

R – Are there disagreements or conflicts between parents over their approaches?

D - *I wouldn't say there is conflict, just we haven't got as much in common....* I just don't get on as well with them because they will say: 'Oh I will come round on such and such' and I have wasted so many days when people say they come round and there isn't a purpose to it. Actually that is a down day for my kids so then I am trying to work out when they will catch up and I don't particularly want them *working at the weekend* but if they need to, to catch up....*Especially now as Emma is at secondary level, she has had to do stuff at the weekend if she has had a down day in the week because otherwise you are behind and you can't always absorb it.*

#### **The children might do work at weekends if missed work during the week - flexibility**

#### EHE and socialisation

R - What are your views about the debates around home education and socialisation?

D – *I think that people who think that home educated kids aren't socialised are the ones whose kids are at school. I don't think anybody who knows and who has met home educated kids ever thinks that they are anything other than social. It was interesting yesterday when I was talking to the lady from the LA because she happened to be speaking to the college about Emma and they were saying: 'What is this child like?' They were just incredulous and she said that she told them that if they met Emma they might think she was perhaps quieter than a child who was at school, who had been let loose to use her words, but once you get to know her you realise that she isn't. In fact I think she said that she was more mature. That she would project as more mature in her outlook than kids who were at school.*

R – Why do you think that is?

D – When she entered nursery, bearing in mind she was just 3, her coping mechanism for been in a class of 40 kids was to not say anything to anyone. She didn't cry, she didn't make a fuss about going she just went quietly and did everything quietly. *She wouldn't answer the register, didn't talk to teachers, didn't talk to kids, didn't interact with anyone and that was ok because she was at school?*

R – So she didn't cope with the environment of school?

D – Not at all....*She didn't cope academically and she didn't cope socially.*

**Link this point to dissatisfaction with schooling....Didn't interact with other children/teachers**

### Benefits of EHE

R - What would you say are the benefits of home education?

D – There are so many aren't there? Well to start with the kids have learnt. I imagine they are age appropriate but I don't know. I don't imagine they are academically struggling; they are certainly not socially struggling....*Emma is far more confident and far more self-assured than she was in school* and that was spotted....She used to be in Rainbows and Brownies when she was at school. She came out of school but she was still going to Brownies and by the time she was leaving Brownies to go to Guides her Brownie leader came up to me and said: 'She is a completely different girl; I can't believe the girl who is going to Guides is the same girl who came from Rainbows to Brownies and wouldn't talk to anyone and wouldn't join in and wouldn't do this and wouldn't do that'. So I noticed it but not to such a great extent....it was gradual, but the Brownie leader had seen her at Rainbows and Brownies and she was watching her go to Guides as a completely different young lady.

**Confidence/self-esteem – mixing more with others – links with other extracts**



## Family bond

R – Do you think you are closer as a family because you are with each other all the time?

D – *Not necessarily, but it has certainly made us understand each other a lot more.* I can't say whether it has made us closer because I don't know what our relationship would have been like if they were away from the house all day. I am probably their fiercest critic. I don't say my children are angels. I am the one that is challenging them all the time to be better. I think they think sometimes that I am quite strict compared to other parents but I know what they are capable of doing so I don't like to accept anything less really. It was certainly better for us when I was ill because they got to see everything as it was happening. Nothing was hidden from them and we were certainly more open with each other and the discussions that we have are amazing. *Each of us can discuss anything because it is that open environment....*

**Acceptance/understanding of different quirks/traits of children as they are together most of the time – link with Merry and Howell's (2009) article**

## Disadvantages of EHE

R – What would you say are the disadvantages of home education?

D – *You are always broke*, because you are relying on one salary. I can't think of any for the kids; maybe other *people's prejudices*; a barrier that they have to overcome. They have got to educate people in what home education is; thinking about camps and groups that they want to be involved in with the leaders. So that is a disadvantage for them. For me, one of the disadvantages is *that you have never got any time*. I get quite envious of people who drop their kids off at school and then have until 3.30pm to do everything that I am trying to fit in around everything else. You have to be quite self-sacrificial to do it I think....*it would be easier to go to work!* It wouldn't matter how high profile your career was....The disadvantages of home schooling are a drop in the ocean though compared to the disadvantages of sending your children to school. You have never ever got enough resources that you want. You might have what you need but you could always do with more.

**Financial – main one**

**People's prejudices – link to perception of EHE**

**Time pressured**

**(Similar arguments to other extracts)**

## Badman Review

R – Do you know much about the Badman Review?

D – Good grief, I just couldn't think of anything worse really. It was so off the wall and I wasn't sure who was pulling his strings. It wasn't focused on what the children

needed. It wasn't looking at children...*I think he was just the front, he was the puppet and there was an ulterior motive behind it.* Home education was getting very popular and I think someone had predicted that they wouldn't need X number of schools if this trend carried on and his remit was don't let it carry on really.

**Unsure about the motivations for the Review – supports other home educators – link to Conroy's (2010) article**

R – Do you think some of the recommendations were good? With regard to access to exam centres and SEN provision?

D – *He could recommend what he wanted but nothing has changed has it?* Except that when we get our visits from the LA we have now got those five silly outcomes which don't help the children at all.

**Landscape for EHE Post-Badman has not changed – although LAs' base it round five Every Child Matters outcomes...look at the policy document**

R – Do you think it helped home education or do you think it hindered it?

D – The fact that they lumped all that in (Kirah Ishaq) but all the stuff in the media was negative. I don't know, I stand to be corrected but *many people were seeing it on the news and could think 'I could do it'*, but it never had a positive spin on it in any media reports I read; television programmes I saw or radio programmes; it was quite negative.

**Positive – might have made more people aware about EHE**

**Relationship with LA**

R – So do you have contact with your LA?

D – Yes....In the early days they used to come once a year and the kids would show her what they had done. In the summer I would write a report and send in what the kids had done and then it seemed like they were just retyping my report really from their visit but that was ok because at least they had seen it for themselves anyway. *Then the last two years it has all been based on these five outcomes* so it's just rubbish. *Even Mike said: 'She has not looked at any of my work'* and for a 10 year old boy he really wanted to show that he had been writing because it is quite a big deal.

R – Have they got a tick list?

D – It appears that way, yes....She didn't have a tick list with her. She just had a plain line pad. *To be honest she was just looking at the children as individuals and the home environment and it was a safeguarding thing....* I don't think that the LA are looking out for their education and that is borne out by having the conversation with the LA officer yesterday where the college had asked her what level Emma was at and she didn't know. Yet she has been visiting us every year except the first year when someone else was in post. So she has virtually admitted to the college that is not what

she does....She was telling them I was an organised parent and she was confident that what I was doing with them was suitable to their age and ability and all that stuff. *But she couldn't honestly tell them what level Emma was at because when she came last January she didn't check any work....* Emma showed her (LA officer) a story she had written but that was it really.

**LA officer unsure of the level Emma was working at – focus on safeguarding – LA practice limited in terms of EHE – relate to DCSF (2007) and Ofsted (2010) Report.**

R – So you feel it is more geared towards safeguarding?

D – Yes, definitely

R – Was that the case before Badman?

D – *Prior to Badman they were looking at what the children were doing and there was no safeguarding but now it's the opposite....* Actually the lady who come to see us, her actual role is *school improvement advisor* so she goes round mostly secondary schools and tells the teachers what they can do to improve their outcomes. So she doesn't have much hands on with the children anyway. I used to think that was an issue in the early days because she is looking at a 4 year old boys work when actually her main role was secondary school and advising teachers. Having said that I have a good relationship with her because if I need anything I can ring up and ask and I welcome her into the house....She is fair, she will help.

### Future of EHE

R - How would you like to see home education develop in the future?

D – Looking at the trends there seems to be more people starting now and deciding not to send their children to school but I don't know whether they are going to do it for the long haul or if they are just going to delay the start of education. There seems to be an awful lot of people who are choosing not to send their children to school. In the future....I don't know, because *home education is different for every family* so what is really important for me *I think is that everyone has the option to choose what is right for their family*. I don't think home education should be constrained in one methodology of doing it a certain way. I guess that is where the *free school stuff* comes in; that is quite constrained, essentially they are tying elastic bands around it.

**Right to educate – link with philosophy of education  
Difference mention between EHE and free schools**

### Advice for prospective home educators

R – If you were asked to summarise home education in a sentence to someone who was thinking about it, what would you say?

D – I'd say it's the best way of ensuring that your child gets what they need.

## 15.7 Appendix 7

### **Example extract indicating the connectivity between the textual data (interviews/stories)**

*The story extracts are highlighted in italics in order to distinguish them from the interview data.*

### **Benefits of EHE**

#### **Parents**

##### **Quality of education**

There were so many advantages. So when people say: ‘What about socialisation? and what about Chemistry?’ You just laugh because you just think did you have the experiences we had? Did you get to visit lots of places? We had so many good things.

**Kate**

I think we have the opportunity for more discussions which I don’t think children get time to do in school.... They get to meet some interesting people as well. We would have never met the EHE group if we didn’t home educate and I think we have benefited a lot from meeting them. **Lynn**

We have been to New Zealand, Australia and several countries in Europe; Spain, Italy, France, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Ireland. So we have been around a fair bit. We have travelled around and he has seen exciting things all over the world and why shouldn’t they?, because it is possible these days. I personally think a home ed person learns more about the moral code and living amongst people than they do at school, and I think the proof is in the pudding.... **Pippa**

I think it is good because we are not restricted and we can go on a lot of trips....EHE isn’t just about trips but it is nice that Jack can get a sense of travel and culture and all that type of stuff. I remember the one time when we wanted to have the Monday off for a weekend in Paris and when I read his report so many months later it said that attendance needed to be seen to. He only had one day off! He saw all these wonderful things and practised his French.... **Catherine**

I would say the children’s attitude towards learning as well, because the idea of learning about absolutely anything doesn’t faze them at all. So if you were going to visit a foreign country you would learn a bit of the language because that is just what they do and it wouldn’t occur to them that they wouldn’t be able to do that. They

define themselves as people who learn things rather than people who can't.

**Samantha**

One of the things I was really surprised at when Jo and Nicole did adult education, they asked a question to the Maths or the History teacher and the teacher would answer it. You don't answer the questions; you get them to find out for yourselves....That is part of learning to learn if you have got a question because there won't always be someone there to answer it and even if you look on Google you know what you are looking for and whether the answer that you get is actually feasible or if it's a bogus website. **Charlotte**

## **Young People**

### **Quality of education**

#### **One to one time**

I mean I think I learnt so much more, because in a lesson in school, the teacher will spend half an hour shouting at the children and 15 minutes setting up and 15 minutes of whatever we are learning, but then obviously with a tutor I am getting four times as much. **Finley**

### **Learning through conversations**

#### **Focus group 1:**

**Lauren**....In my case particularly it's been much more like growing up rather than learning stuff. It's growing up and thinking: 'Oh I want to do this' and I can 'do it like this', rather than saying to achieve some indefinable goal in the future you must do all these things.

**Luke** – It isn't really studying it is just....

**Lauren** – being

**Luke** – growing

**Lauren** – Yes. I mean I am interested in Economics because I got involved in the sustainability movement, the transition towns movement and through that met an Economist who was very interested in Marxian Economic and started a currency with him. So it wasn't: 'Today I'm going to learn about Economics', it was just one conversation led to another, led to another.

**Luke** – You get quite a lot out of conversations. Quite a lot more than you would in school. In school you've got a timetable that you follow. Science here and History here, but in home education depending on who you are talking to and where the conversation is going one might lead into the other.

### **Questioning/exploring**

I think home education makes you more open minded because you are around so many different people. You explore different subjects, like more understanding of the world beyond. A lot of people come out of school and don't know what they want to do, because they have sort of been fed through something. You are not asked what you would like to learn. **Olly**

### **Focus group 2:**

**Scarlett** – The quality of education definitely is an advantage

*Researcher* – In terms of been more varied?

**Scarlett** – No, just in terms of how you learn

**Leanne** – And that you can achieve something. For me been a zoo keeper isn't a typical job and it's hard to get into, so for any little kid that said they want to be a zoo keeper, the teacher would say: 'That is not realistic think about something else'

**Carrie** – Also if you are not academic I think they would have written you off a long time ago as an underachiever....But actually having that one to one or even that one to four is so much better than a one to thirty class ratio. The quality of the education that you get and the learning that you get is excellent; you are being taught to question

**Clare** – Yes, been able to ask questions and you know that you can find an answer for yourself

### **Children**

### **Quality of education**

I also like that you get different types of books for different things, whereas at school you have a specific book....Like at school they might have a specific book for Maths, but I have counted out three Maths curriculum's that I am doing. I have got mathematical reasoning; Life of Fred and Matthew C. **Ben**

### **Parents**

### **Flexibility**

I also think that if something is happening we can go off and do that. So if it is a nice day we can go up the park and do some painting or sketching....**Lynn**

I think you can just tune in to what your child wants and they haven't got to do what you do at school, and do a little bit of each. You can say well Jack enjoys art so he can

go off in that direction or if he likes rocks and minerals or geography and you can research down that route....**Catherine**

Being able to do things at the children's' own pace and being able to tailor make things and them not wasting time on unnecessary trivia. The fact that if a child wants to do a subject or a course they can just do it; in six weeks Isaac covered the GCSE English syllabus. We didn't do much else in that six weeks but that is what we did; so you can go in-depth with it. **Mia**

What I think is the best thing of home education is if you have got a child in the middle of something and they get really, really interested and they want to carry on and they want to finish what they are doing, the bell doesn't ring and you don't have to stop. When you are at school you can be the person in art class who loves art, you can be the person on the sports field who loves sport, you can actually be the child in the History class who is getting really hooked on the beheading of Charles 1<sup>st</sup> and then the bell rings and you have to stop. **Margaret**

On a trite thing I would say you don't have to get up early in the morning and do the school run, you don't have to turn out to fetch them at 3.00 and you can work if they are up to working. We did a lot of working at night, when we stopped been so structured during the day, because we are all owls in this house, we are not Larks. Sometimes we would get up at 11am and start working at 4pm and be up till 2am.

**Margaret**

## **Young people**

### **Flexibility:**

#### **No time pressure**

I have more time; that is the important part. I have more time to work; I have more time to do music, to do anything I want. I feel better about what I want to do and I can choose what I want to do and it makes me feel good about how I feel; how I am.

**Aaron**

There is the ability for more free study and studying where your interests lead you; there is the ability to be flexible and go somewhere whenever you feel like it, so rather than waiting for a school trip, just going to a museum on a week day and not having the crowds. **Carly**

I always found there was a lot less wasted time. There felt like so much more time in the day when I was at home, because apart from the travel time there is all the lining up and register and teachers' trying to get control of the class. Richie wasn't talking over my mum and throwing paper aeroplanes at my head. **Hannah**

There is an advantage to the flexible hours as well. You don't have to get everything done within the school hours. You can keep going longer or get it done quicker, or do it at a particular time. I get up quite late but then I can work into the night....I'm going to go conservative and say I get up at 10.30....Then I will work as long as I need to, to get the work done. **Nathan**

....You get to choose your friends, you get to wear whatever you want when you are learning. You can go anywhere you want and you can do it any time you want. You can wake up at 2.00 in the afternoon if you want and do five or six hours of work and then do what you want for the rest of the night. **Riley**

### **Adapt learning style**

The pros of home education is....you get one on one a lot more, where you can learn at your speed and for what you know rather than what the entire group knows....**Sarah**

I would say that you have got more flexibility to fit your learning style to how you learn....When you go through school there is a tendency to assume that everyone learns the same way. Just to try and get them through and everyone who doesn't learn that way is just going to end up falling behind.....**Nathan**

The benefits I think would be that you can tailor the education to the child's specific needs. Not just on a level of learning subjects that the child wants to learn but learning the subject how the child needs to learn. I wasn't as good at listening and reading so we tailored it to things I could watch and do visual stuff, and stuff with my hands.

**Richie**

### **Pursue interests**

I had a keen interest in Psychology and started devouring that. I was interested in it and it made my college experience more enjoyable because I already had a foundation in it. The stuff I went into learn was stuff I already knew about. **Jacob**

I think it does offer you the time to explore things that aren't on the curriculum. I did a massive project in mental health which I think has led to me doing this OU course in psychology. Dad still works in mental health and mum was a psychiatric nurse for a long time so I had two psychiatric nurses for parents and they had loads of knowledge to impart and loads of old text books for me to read. **Hannah**

My whole life is very diverse, but I'm not doing something I don't want to do, but likewise I am able to do everything I want to do. Once I reached A Levels and that stage I didn't have to choose between Science and English. Whereas some of my friends maybe had to lose the History in order to focus on the Science. That shouldn't be the way because they enjoy the History as much. I haven't had to make that decision which I think has been very beneficial. **Issac**



### **EHE group:**

We could fit in going to robotics competitions as home educators, which you probably wouldn't be allowed to do in school. We went to Japan for instance with the Robotics club....In the first year we got to go to an international competition in the Netherlands and we tied at 26<sup>th</sup> out of 52 teams worldwide. We also came 4<sup>th</sup> for team work....**Jessica**

## **Children**

### **Flexibility:**

#### **No time pressure**

I like that you can work in your own time and you can choose which subjects you can do first and you don't have to do it in a set order or a set time. You can follow what you are interested in because you would only get the weekends if you were in school.

**Emma**

#### **Adapt learning style**

**Ben** – I have two things that I like about home schooling....Whenever mum reads she gets us to pop into some sleeping bags and sometimes when mum does history she gets out some (asthma) inhalers and teddy bears and mum does loads of other fun stuff....

**Mum** – Yes we did the feudal system using inhalers and teddy bears to represent the different people, such as peasants.

**Amie** -I also like that we get to play music on our key board (Mum mentions that she has purchased an internet package where the children get to be taught by different composers from Beethoven to Mozart).

### **Pursue interests**

*The thing I enjoy most about home education is the freedom. We do try to follow a sort of curriculum but if we want to do something or go somewhere we can.*

**Jennifer – story extract.**

*I really enjoy home education because while we do the work I also have lots of time to do the things I enjoy like reading, baking, sewing, knitting and other art.* **Katie – Story extract.**

*At the moment my favourite subject is writing. I write a lot about my horses. I am really trying to improve on my neatness in my writing. I have recently written a letter*

*for my foster sister so that when she moves on to be adopted she can look back at this letter and see what she was like when she was younger. I am hoping to start writing about a Dudley Cannel trip I went on.* **Emma – story extract.**

I like the freedom of it, because mum will see a project that Simon (brother) did in school and we can do it. A lady from Rougely power station went into the school and did an energy project, and mum spoke to her and we ended up doing Forest School and an energy project with her. **Jennifer**

I like all the things I do, especially art. I have time to enter competitions with my art or stories....I won the National Geographic competition....I said in my poem that you can have adventures everywhere; far away or close to home with your family or on your own. I did a drawing as well and I wrote about Ranulph Fiennes as my celebrity....What was great when we went to London for the competition was that I got free orange juice and we had a private room....Ben Fogle was there and he announced the winner with an envelope and said my name. I got a book from Ben Fogle and do you know what he put inside? He said I think you are a brilliant adventurer, or something like that and I hope to read your book when you are older.

**Jack**

#### **EHE groups/volunteering:**

All the groups we attend really. Like if we were in school we would probably never have gone to the home school group which would have been a shame because we have got friends there....We get to spend time with nice people....If we were in school I'm sure we would meet nice people but we would probably meet a lot of nasty people.

We can more choose who we have to talk to. **Katie**

*We've done lots of things that most people would not have the chance to do such as camping in the Wyre Forest where we did lots of things including pond dipping, lighting fires, building shelters, looking for deer, toasting marshmallows, singing songs and weaving.* **Katie – story extract**

We do volunteering stuff as well which I don't think you would have time to do if you were in school. We help out at the park; friends of Hayden Hill....**If you look at that photo** you can see that we dress up and stuff. There are always loads of events on....**Sophie**

## **Parents**

### **Life skills:**

### **Develop as a person**

....I think above all one of the best things about the entire experience is not to do with the home education per se but I hope the girls have learnt that you can step outside the system; you don't have to do everything that the politicians tell you is right. As much as we have studied Maths, English and Geography, it is about teaching individual freedom at the same time respecting the fact that the law is there and respecting other people. **Margaret**

I just found that they became more rounded human beings; they don't have the pressure of school; they don't have the pressure of having the right jacket or the correct trainers with the right logo on it, and they don't get into the same crazes. That said they develop a maturity as well that means they have a responsibility that perhaps are taken away from children because children's lives are so structured within the school system that they don't have the ability of making decisions; decisions are made for them. **Grace**

They are allowed to develop their own person; into a full person rather than a limited person.....He is much more aware of who he is and what he wants in life....We have started to go to colleges to see which places he wants to go to and every time he approaches the teachers and talks to them they go 'Oh', there is open mouths and then they hear he is home educated and they get all interested because he has made such a good impression from the start, and how did that happen? Because he is a whole person. He doesn't have to make others feel bad to feel good about himself....**Pippa**

### **Self-motivation**

I'm convinced that motivation, that ability to achieve comes from the fact that when you are at home there is only you and you have to do it....I think the fact that you have to stand on your own two feet, you are never going to be able to copy anybody else's work, you haven't got nobody at school to say: 'Can I borrow your home-work?' Or 'how do you do this?'. They are very self-sufficient in that respect.

**Margaret**

I think in some ways the transition from home education to further education or the work place might be easier. My children had comments from lecturers telling them that they can tell the difference between them and their self-motivation towards learning than they can from some who have come straight from school. **Grace**

Dudley College said they were really happy to have EHE young people, because the one's they have had have done really well. The art tutor said that one of his best students ever was a girl who had being home educated all of her life and we got to see some of her art work. **Lynn**

### **Initiative**

....at the moment our eldest is building wooden crosses to sell in the Church at Easter. He has also learnt that if he gives a certain percentage of the profit to the Church

people are more inclined to put an order in. The crosses' he is making with the wood joints is very skilled actually. He is ever the entrepreneur....**Amanda**

### **Confidence**

....Emma is far more confident and far more self-assured than she was in school, as she was selective mute so she didn't talk anyway. She rarely spoke to family members if she could get away with it....She used to be in Rainbows and Brownies when she was at school. She came out of school and by the time she was leaving Brownies to go to Guides her Brownie leader came up to me and said: 'She is a completely different girl; I can't believe the girl who is going to Guides is the same girl who came from Rainbows to Brownies and wouldn't talk to anyone and wouldn't join in and wouldn't do this and wouldn't do that....**Dawn**

Jennifer didn't want to go anywhere without me when she was growing up and all the other little girls were going dancing or ballet or whatever. I have tried to take her but she flips and is just like: No', but since been home educated she is more confident. Some people might think the reverse would be true though....**Natasha**

## **Young People**

### **Life skills:**

#### **Develop as a person**

I think I matured a lot better after been home educated. I know it is silly to say because I was 13 when I was in school but in school I would deal with things in a really bad way. I would come home and flip at everybody and shout and scream. Through been home educated, having to be self-motivated and socialising with young children and adults, I matured a lot quicker and a lot more healthily. **Richie**

I think the best thing is it lets individuals know themselves. I mean I didn't know who I was when I was in school. I was just one of everyone, and I think the absolutely most amazing thing about home education is it brings people with character. If you look at humanity through the ages it's always the characters whether they be good or bad or doing something completely wacky that make it interesting. I think the school system actually....It's like a mono-culture if something goes wrong the whole thing topples. Whereas home education is like having a proper mixed meadow which is more nutritious and doesn't get damaged so much if there is a drought. It is much more flexible and I think it produces people who are much more emotionally happy and healthy I guess. **Lauren**

I really credit what I am now to the people I met through home education. In school I tried to follow along with what everyone was doing as much as I could so I could fit in. In EHE you don't have to do that. I can remember the changes I went through

when I first got to home education from being like more aggressive and angry to a lot more laid back....**Tom**

I think home education forces you to consider what you really want; what your options are and to think outside of the box. It isn't something that your just drift into. I mean you drift into university, and you drift into the next step and the one after that. You really stop and think about whether that is what you want to do or not. It forces you to be self-motivated and think well this is my end point what do I need to get there. **Carrie**

### **Practical skills:**

....I think home educating people have better life skills because they spend a lot of time with their families so they pick up habits of their parents in terms of cooking and stuff. My girlfriend who was home educated could cook a full meal by the time she was 8. **Riley**

I think it has made me more independent. In school I relied on my mum to get my bag ready for me for the next day, to make sure my uniform was ironed, to cook my tea when I came back and to do the shopping. Now I am home educated, I have no problem going to do the weekly shop or cooking tea....I have learnt how to cook and I have become a lot more independent. **Sarah**

### **Motivation**

....I definitely think that home education had an effect in increasing my confidence and making me proactive and interested in a variety of things....Over summer I worked as a Marketing Assistant for an ICT Company in the city and I am also a member of the Labour Party....**Carly**

I think my home education experience has helped me at university, because some people struggle with self-motivation but that is all I have had. It is familiar ground to me. I struggle now to work other than that. I don't like working on campus for example. I prefer to go back to my room and do my work there. **Edward**

### **Confidence:**

If I stayed in school I would be completely different. I wouldn't be as confident as I am definitely; I have so much more confidence. Now I could go back to school. If I went back in time as I am now I would survive....**Finley**

Even when we went to the family gatherings after a year of me being home educated some family members were surprised that I was more confident. They noticed I had changed. **Scott**

### **Passion for learning:**

It means that you still want to learn when you finish education....You don't finish education, because ok a normal child who goes to school will have lost their will to learn....Not will, but lost their enthusiasm for learning so early, that when they have finished it, they are like 'Ah, I have had enough'. **Geoff**

I think home education allows you to choose subjects that you are interested in. I was doing Geology and all this stuff and the element of choice really can ignite your interest in learning. I think a big problem is actually getting kids interested in what they are learning and I wasn't. I did used to be like that but now it seems crazy as I love learning. **Edward**

We don't get to a certain age where we think ok I have got my qualifications. I think when we want to learn something, we go and learn something and I'm pretty sure that will continue if we want to get a completely different job, and we will acquire the skills we need. **Luke**

### **Wider social mix**

The home education community is such a diverse range of people as well; there are so many different characters. I think you keep more individuality because you are not been forced into a shape that you don't necessarily want to be forced into. Everyone is equal and there is no peer pressure so it is kind of nice because in a school setting there is a lot of peer pressure and you have got to stick up with the cool children.

**Jamie**

### **Children**

### **Life Skills**

#### **Increased confidence**

It has actually helped being EHE because now I will go I will go with one of my friends from the EHE group round Lichfield. Mum will be in Lichfield somewhere but I won't know where she will be. I will be with my friend on my own and I would never have done that ....When I first came out of school I lost all my confidence but now I'm more confident than when I was in school. **Jennifer**

### **Practical skills**

*My family went back to New Zealand for a month in January. We stayed with our old neighbours. Twice when we were there they took us fishing. One the second time I caught a fish and they taught me how to gut it. That was a very cool day.* **Sophie—  
story extract**

### **Wider social mix**

*Every time we go somewhere new there is an opportunity to meet new people and to learn.* **Jennifer – story extract.**

## **Parents**

### **Family bond**

We did go through a traumatic time because my husband left when Nicole was five, so that was 12 years ago, and it was a case of when we were crying we could cry together. I didn't have to send them each off to their different school and their different classes where they didn't know anyone or couldn't talk about it. **Charlotte**

I think one of the biggest things I have noticed is how the kids get on actually. The younger three particularly have a very close relationship with each other that the older three didn't have at that age because they all split off. So the stupid bickering and the nastiness strangely I am not getting it this time around and I think it is because they have to learn to share with each other. **Joy**

It has made us understand each other a lot more. I don't say my children are angels; I am the one that is challenging them all the time to be better. It was certainly better for us when I was ill because they got to see everything as it was happening; nothing was hidden from them and we were certainly more open with each other and the discussions that we have are amazing. Each of us can discuss anything because it is that open environment....**Dawn**

### **Young people**

#### **Family bond**

Mum has never talked to me about sex or drugs or drink or anything like that. I think I was 15 when I first realised what sex and drugs or drink really was.... I have a lot of respect for my mum, because she is right to not want her children to swear near her, or have sex until they are 16 and she is right about not drinking and things like that.

#### **Riley**

I think families who home school it promotes a closeness. You are with your parents more and you are not in your little bubbles going to schools and different work places all the time. That closeness helps you deal with things in life as well. **Hannah**

## **Children**

### **Family bond**

I like to be near my Mum. I came out of school when I was 6 because I missed my mom and the teachers were not nice. **Jack**

## 15.8Appendix 8

### Examples of Photos

The following pictures highlight further the resources used by home educated children and young people and the activities engaged in:

**Below are examples of Ben (9) and Amie's (7) home education practice:**

#### Literature

**Picture 1**

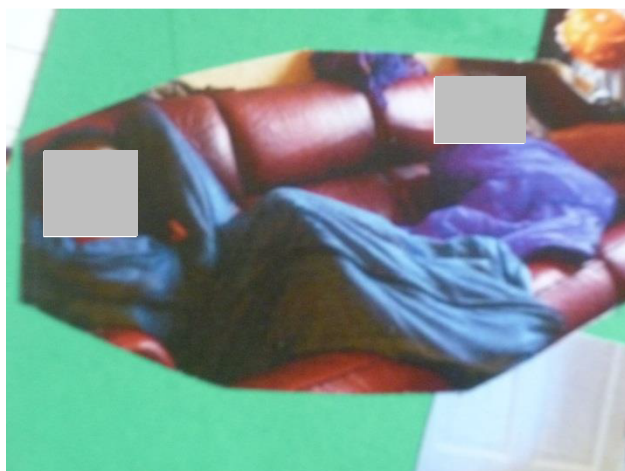


**Picture 2**



Wide variety of reading material

**Picture 3**

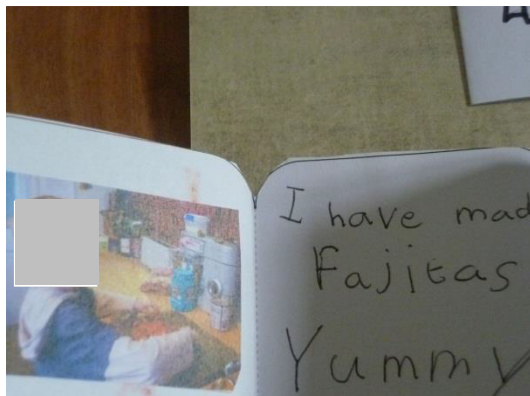


‘Story Time’



## Practical/creative pursuits

**Picture 4**



Ben cooking

**Picture 5**



Amie playing the key board

**Picture 6**



All of the children 'doing' Art

**Picture 7**



Visit to Birmingham Art Gallery –  
Leonardo Da' Vinci Exhibition

## Geography/cultural activities

**Picture 8**



Learn about different countries

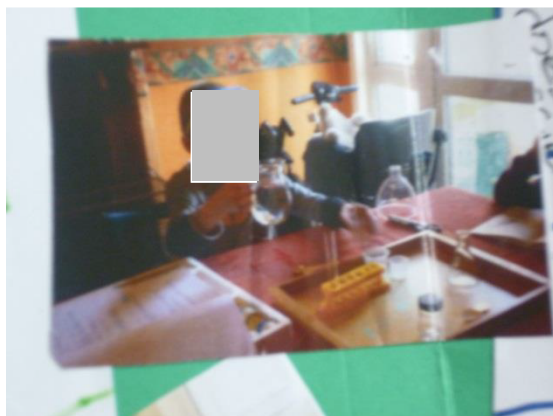
**Picture 9**



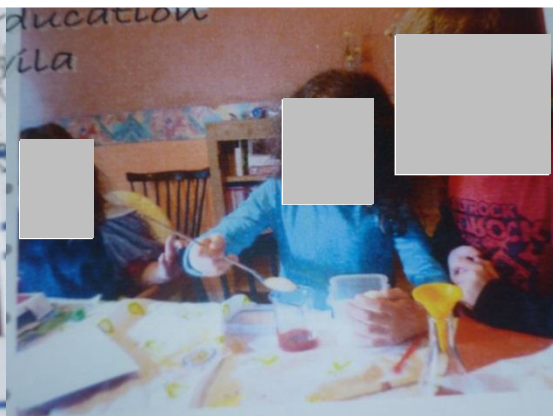
Explore their Scottish heritage

## Science experiments

**Picture 10**



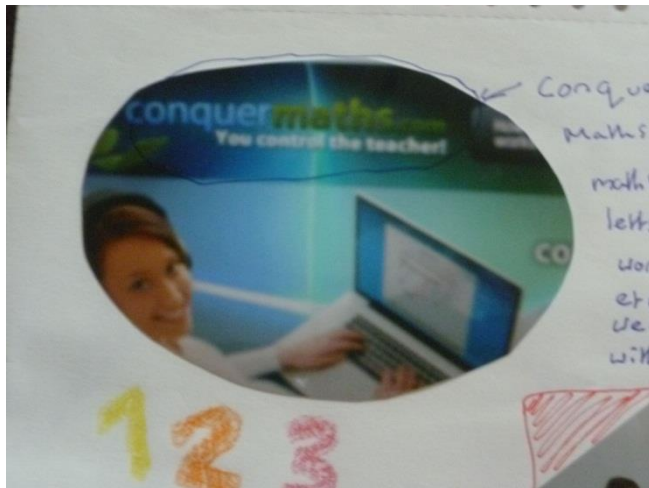
**Picture 11**



## Examples of Jennifer's (12) home education practice and resources:

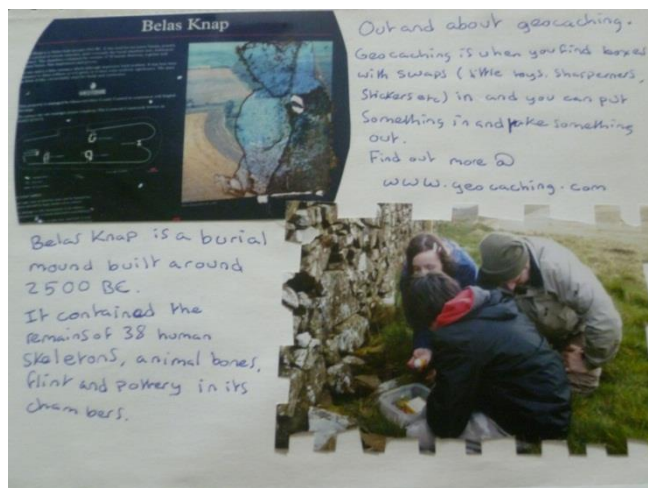
Learning opportunities/resources:

**Picture 1: Numeracy**



Picture 1 shows a resource that Jennifer uses for Maths called: 'Conquer Maths' (an online maths programme).

**Picture 2: Exploring Humanity subjects**



In picture 2: Jennifer, her brother and father are taking part in an activity called 'geo-coaching' at Belas Knap, a historic burial ground.

**Picture 3: Practical skills – baking**



Picture 3 shows the outcome of baking bread rolls. However, the caption next to it highlights that this was not the only outcome as Jennifer and her friend also researched about flour and the shelf-life of bread. This task formed part of a recognised award (CREST– project based award for STEM subjects).

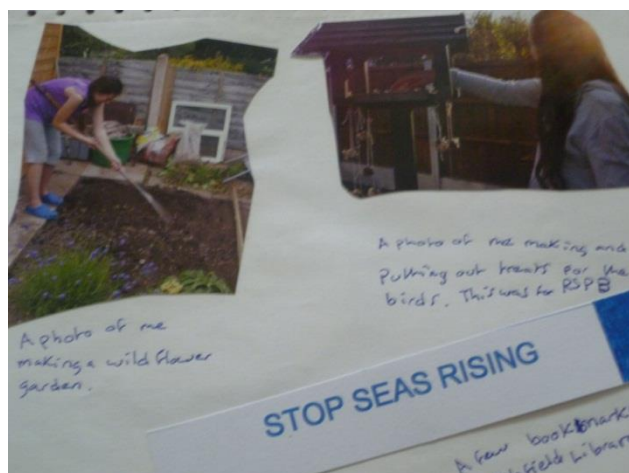
**Picture 4: Textiles**



In picture 4 Jennifer is dying a top that she actually wore on one occasion when I visited her (heart t-shirt). She explained that too much dye can be 'disastrous' hence the measuring jug in the picture.



### Picture 5: Environmental activities



In picture 5, Jennifer is making a wild flower garden and putting out home-made treats for the birds. She mentioned the importance of being environmentally aware and respecting other eco-systems.

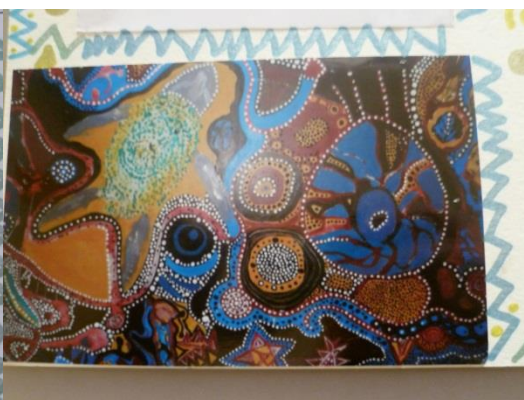
### Examples of Jack's (9) interests:

The following pictures are examples of Jack's art work:

Picture 1

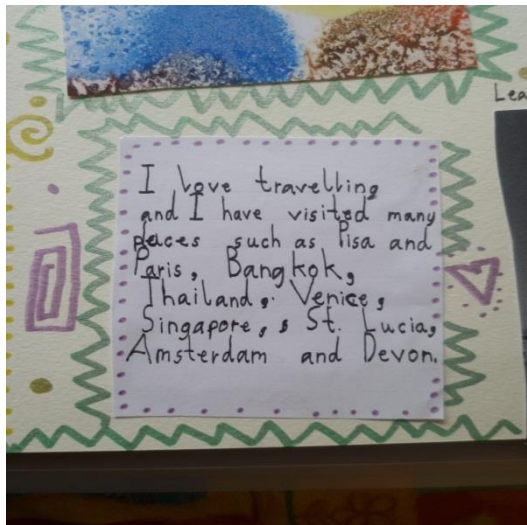


Picture 2



The pictures below are some examples of the places Jack has visited:

**Picture 3**



**Picture 4**



**Examples of Sophie (15) and Katie's (12) interests:**

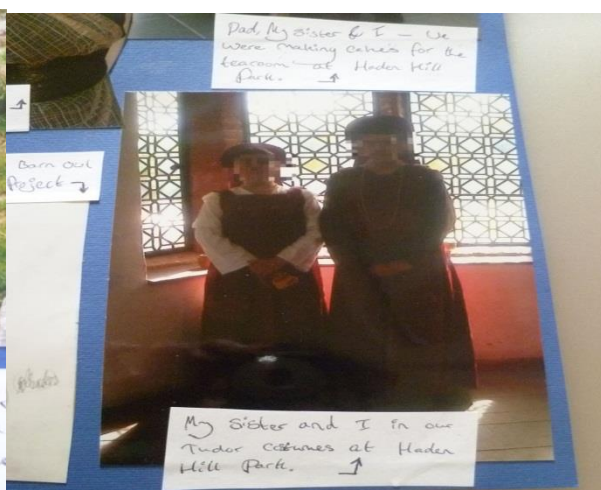
The pictures below show Sophie (and her sister) participating in various activities:

**Picture 1**



Sophie at Cadets

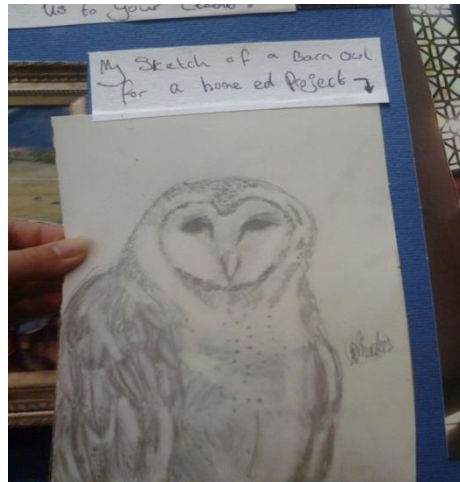
**Picture 2**



Volunteering at their local Museum

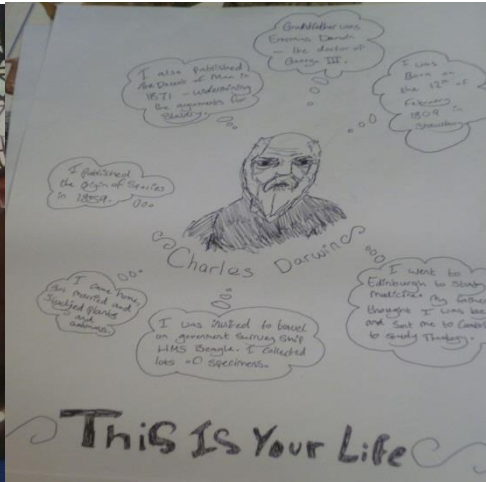
Examples of Sophie's Art and Science work:

**Picture 3**



Sketch of a Barn Owl

**Picture 4**



Biography of Charles Darwin

The pictures below highlight some of the activities that Emma engages in:

**Picture 1**



Emma at the Sailing Club she attends

**Picture 2**



Emma 'hugging' her horse Pinkie

## 15.9 Appendix 9

### Example of Annotated Story Extract (Sophie, 15)

This is probably not the best time to write this. I am really tired. And I mean *really*! I was on a camp with my air cadet squadron all weekend and the two nights I was away I managed to go to sleep extremely late. – **Link to social groups/activities** On Saturday night we had a big field-craft exercise. We were in three teams and had to steal a flux capacitor from the adult staff (if they touched you then you ‘died’). As it was night we had to be very quiet and cautious – even though the staff were walking about saying (very loudly in weird accents) that their urine was a funny colour and that if they caught us then they would gut us like kittens.

It was one of the most amazing things I have ever done. My team was pretty awesome too. Cadets is something I do on Monday and Wednesday nights, we do sport, lessons (this usually involves the RAF and stuff about planes), *DofE*, *flying* (I’ve never done this), *gliding* (this is amazing but makes you feel sick), *field craft* (you learn various things including how to search vehicles, how to sneak about without being seen and how to put on cam (camouflage) cream) and *Drill* (marching, saluting and so on – all the fun of the fair) as well as various projects.

You would think I wouldn’t have much trouble with this. I am usually good at writing but lately I keep having problems (though I do have a plan of action which is quite good). Writing is definitely my favourite part of home ed stuff. Creating a world and filling it with characters is amazing. – Refers to the **Medieval Fantasy Novel** **Sophie is currently writing** When I write something I usually do a lot of drawing – generally of the main character. I like doing art. So far I have got the hang of sketching, pen and ink drawings, charcoal and acrylic paints. **Refer to her picture of a Barn Owl – in her interview she also mentioned ‘flexibility’ to pursue her passion for art/writing.**

My mother, my sister and I went to see a really cool Pre-Raphaelite exhibition at the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery last year (with some other homeschoolers). We



were supposed to do some worksheets but I got them done as quickly as I could and spent as much time as I could sketch things from the paintings. I especially liked drawing the eyes as they were really difficult to copy well. Then – when I had finished – I put what I had learned together and did a picture of my own.

Until I was eleven (I'm 15 in 2 weeks and 2 days) we lived in New Zealand (though we lived in England until I was five but I can't remember that very well). It was cool growing up there; we had lots of pet animals and lived next to several farms. When we lived in NZ, my sister and I did quite different things from what we do over here. We did horse riding lessons, swimming lessons and drama classes.

Over here we do things with groups and go to historical buildings. We also have a regular group that we meet up with to work towards awards. At the moment we are doing an Asdan Award – our group is doing a mini UN Summit (I chose to be Greece). – **Link to the John Muir Award they are doing – environmental EHE group is focused around set targets (i.e. learning about fair trade)**

I have to write a speech for this. I need to do some research as it needs to be done for the Thursday after next.

In the part behind my house there is a museum – my family and I volunteer there. We help run the tea room (though we get to eat the leftover cake) and we help out at the events. **Volunteering – civic skills – move to section on Volunteering and Citizenship.** Some events happen every year – like the Tudor Christmas Event with Santa (though not the real one) and the 1940s Night. We used to have a company of actors come once a year to put on one of Shakespeare's plays (last year it was the Tempest) but not enough people came so this year the play is the Railway Children.

My family went back to New Zealand for a month in January. We stayed with our old neighbours. Twice when we were there they took us fishing. One the second time *I caught a fish and they taught me how to gut it.* That was a very cool day.

**Learn practical – 'real-world' skills**

We went to the Big Bang Fair yesterday. It was awesome. We got to see some amazing things – like the Air Penguins. They kept going over our heads. They looked like they were swimming in the air.

**Big Bang was a popular exhibition among home educating families – link to Jennifer’s story (she went into greater depth about this exhibition)**

Mum says that not everyone can home school. She is right – but for me it is certainly better than anything else (I have been to school – though only for a term – I wanted to see what it was like). **This was not mentioned in the interview – ask Sophie to elaborate on this**

I think I like it so much because I have more of a say in what I learn about – I do not like being told what to learn. That was one of the most annoying things about school. For me home schooling is awesome.