

**HOME EDUCATION:  
THE EXPERIENCE OF PARENTS IN A  
DIVIDED COMMUNITY**

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## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the experiences of families who for a variety of reasons find themselves outside of the school system. It is concerned with families in one London borough who have decided not to send their children to school and to educate them at home. It examines the experiences of families who make a positive choice to home educate because of philosophical or religious beliefs but is particularly concerned with families who home educate following a series of difficulties with the school system, perhaps because their child has been bullied or because their child has special educational needs.

The thesis contributes and adds to studies on home education as very little has been written about families who feel forced out of formal schooling. Only in the last few years has the diverse nature of the home educating population in the UK started to be acknowledged in the professional literature.

The research for this study was carried out between 2003 and 2005. When the research was started there were 38 families with 55 children known to the local authority to be home educating. Of these 38 families, 17 were interviewed in order to gain the perceptions and experiences of parents.

In this thesis, four key areas of home education are considered. Firstly, the reasons that parents give for home education are reviewed. Secondly, the educational experience of home education is considered, including the methods of teaching that parents choose, as well as the academic achievement of those home educated. Thirdly, this study examines the relationship between home education and state education and considers whether parents' own experiences of formal schooling influenced their decision to educate their own children. Finally, policies on home education are examined both in the UK and in other countries.

The conclusion reached is that the community of home educators in the UK is indeed a deeply divided one in all the key areas studied.

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Finally, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my supervisor, Len Barton, for his invaluable support and advice.

## Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

..... *B. A. Burke* ..... B.A.Burke

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## Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	<i>Page ii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>Page iii</i>
<i>Declaration</i>	<i>Page iv</i>
<i>Statement</i>	<i>Page vi</i>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b>	<b>Page 1</b>
<b>Chapter 2 Methodology</b>	<b>Page 8</b>
<b>Chapter 3 The reasons parents give for home educating</b>	<b>Page 27</b>
<b>Chapter 4 The educational experience of home education</b>	<b>Page 46</b>
<b>Chapter 5 The relationship between home education and state education</b>	<b>Page 66</b>
<b>Chapter 6 The policy process and home education</b>	<b>Page 85</b>
<b>Chapter 7 Conclusion - The divided community of home educators</b>	<b>Page 104</b>
<i>References</i>	<i>Page 107</i>
<i>Appendices</i>	
<i>i. Policy documents</i>	<i>Page 115</i>
<i>ii. Parent interviews</i>	<i>Page 121</i>
<i>iii. Tables</i>	<i>Page 124</i>

## **Statement of how the various elements of the EdD programme have linked together and contributed to my professional understanding and knowledge**

### **Introduction**

The EdD programme has contributed to my own professional understanding and knowledge in three main ways by enabling me to:

- reflect on current educational policy;
- extend my professional understanding of issues such as inclusion;
- develop my skills as a researcher.

Throughout my period of study I have focused on research that relates to my own professional interests. My current post is Head of an Inclusion Development Unit in an inner London borough. This post, at the start of the course, was primarily concerned with supporting schools in the area of special educational needs. It subsequently expanded to include support for ethnic minority achievement and home education. As my responsibilities widened over time at work, so did my research interests.

### **Policy**

One element of the course, in particular, helped me to gain an understanding of policy making in education. This was when I examined the development of the Inclusive Education Policy in my own local authority. This study provided numerous insights into how policy is made, implemented and evaluated. In the authority where I work it was a group of parents who fought for and won the right for children with disabilities to be educated alongside their non-disabled peers.

I found Stephen Ball's (1992) conceptual framework a useful basis for examining policy. He provided a model of three policy contexts. Firstly, the context of influence; secondly, the context of text production and thirdly the

context of practice. This provided a more flexible model than the more traditional top-down view of policy making. It was particularly useful as it assumed that participants played an active role in the development of policy. Gillian Fulcher's (1989) work in this area was also helpful. She viewed policy as being determined at all levels eg classroom, school, local authority etc. For her, individuals were able to make choices within a framework of constraints. People did not simply behave as puppets subject to the whim of external forces. The notion of policy being made at all levels corresponded to what had taken place in my own authority. Parents who wanted their children included viewed policy making as a political act and, from the start, they adopted tactics that would help them to succeed. Two parents, for example, were elected onto the local council and one became Chair of Education. The taught course on policy increased my awareness that in recent years there have been considerable changes in education. There has been a far greater emphasis on market principles and competition. Tensions exist between different aspects of government policy. A focus on individuality and the free market does not sit easily with a focus on inclusion. Recent reviews of the inclusion policy in my authority have been more cautious than the original policy that focused on equal opportunities and rights. A key reason for this has been the re-structuring of relations between national and local government. Local authorities are less able to impose their own policies in the world of education. My role at work has altered several times as a direct consequence of government policy. For example, from being a local authority inspector, I became an Ofsted inspector and more recently a School Improvement Partner (SIP). What the EdD programme has shown me is that implementing an inclusion policy is far from simple. Policy changes do not

occur in a vacuum but are part of a much broader educational debate.

Currently, whilst at a national level there is a notional commitment to inclusion, this commitment is made within a wider political and policy context that can be viewed as antithetical to inclusion.

### **Inclusion**

Early on in the EdD programme, I became aware that the theoretical underpinning of special educational needs is not robust. Writers such as Foucault (1982) showed how language and ways of thinking can influence our perceptions of what is being studied. I became aware that concepts such as 'special educational needs' can reflect and perpetuate a system that manages people regarded as deviant. Foucault showed how the knowledge of medicine and psychiatry can cause individuals to be thought of as subjects. Theoretical language and the practice linked to that language can have considerable consequences for the individuals who are the subjects of such a discourse. Traditionally those pupils who it was felt could not cope with a mainstream education had been educated in special schools. What is key in all of this is the emphasis on the role of discourse. For example, a system that separates disabled and non-disabled children and sends the former to special schools is based on a divisive discourse. The notion of discourse shows how closely linked theory and practice are in special education. Embedded within discourses are relationships involving power and knowledge. When the terminology of psychiatry is used, for example, 'diagnosis' or 'therapy', it causes us to view children as 'patients' in need of treatment. Discourse analysis increased my awareness of how social relationships can be determined by our views of disability and special education.

Schools in the authority that I work in have responded in different ways to inclusion. Some schools have, from the beginning, welcomed all pupils and have sought pedagogical solutions to ensure that pupils have access to the curriculum. Other schools, for various reasons, have been more hesitant. There is often a real tension between the demand for high academic standards and the pressure to include pupils with special educational needs. In many ways the publication of national tests in league tables has penalised inclusive schools.

I was strongly influenced by Gramsci's notion of ideological hegemony. For Gramsci (1971), the key characteristic of any ideology is not simply the way it legitimates ideas but also the way it ensures the complicity of others. Gramsci views ideology as providing the 'cement' out of which hegemony is built. At work, where I used to write about equal opportunities, pedagogy and access to the curriculum, today I write far more about monitoring, impact, target setting and value added. For me, it is noticeable how what have been termed New Right educational beliefs have taken over the agenda. So much so that many people working in local authorities identify with and hold these ideas to be their own.

### **Research**

Initially, the focus of my EdD was on how pupils defined as having special educational needs were included in mainstream schools. As I progressed through the various assignments and the Institution Focused Study, I became increasingly aware that the term 'inclusion' has widened in recent years to encompass issues of equity and diversity. At first sight, my final piece of work, my thesis, appears to go off in a totally different direction focusing as it does on the divided community of home educators. However, many pupils who

have been marginalised or excluded from mainstream schools end up in this community.

When I researched home education in the local authority where I work, it was important to continually revisit both the ethics and the purpose of my research. Questions needed to be continually raised with regard to myself as the researcher, the parents who were being researched and the ethics involved in such research. As Barton stated

The sociality of the research process entails the art of listening to a variety of voices and through interaction with others developing a greater self understanding that is the outcome of a critical stance towards one's own presuppositions, priorities and practices. (Barton 1998 p29)

With insider research a key question is to what extent is it possible for an 'insider' such as myself to gain sufficient self understanding in order that my observations might count as valid knowledge. Gadamer (1975) questioned the likelihood of outsider researchers understanding social relationships better than insider researchers who bring practical experience. Gadamer challenged the ontological assumptions that implied that it was possible to detach oneself from social practice as an outside critical theorist. Through reading Gadamer, I became aware that whilst views of social practice can be distorted by 'structures of domination', such distortion affects outsider researchers as well as insider practitioners.

As well as considerations as to the responsibilities of the researcher, my thesis on home education involved many practical issues at all stages of the research process. In conducting my research I became aware both through the literature and from practical experience just how difficult it is to identify the home education population. If parents never send their child to school then they have no obligation to inform the local authority that they are home

educating. Thus my research was limited from the outset and could only focus on those parents registered as home educators. I had further difficulty because the home education population in my authority was particularly transient with parents moving in and out of school and from one area to another.

Perhaps of greatest concern was the fact that very early on in my research I became aware that my findings were not in line with UK research as a whole. In many studies, for example, that done by Paula Rothermel, the main reasons given for home educating were those concerned with family ideology and those relating to experiences at school. Rothermel stated that the 'Christian Right does not exert a significant impact in Britain'. (Rothermel 2003 p 82).

In my research, religion was the most important factor. The second largest group of parents gave the difficulties that their child had experienced at school as the key factor in their decision. Few of the parents that I interviewed gave pedagogy or lifestyle as their main reason.

During the EdD course it was with great relief that I came across work by Michael Apple and others in North America. Researchers such as Apple had found that religion was a very significant factor when parents chose to home educate. My research would suggest that home education in the UK has far more in common with what is going on in North America than was previously thought. Whilst it is not appropriate to generalise from a particular piece of research and apply it to other settings, I would hope that my research on home education would, at least, raise some very pertinent questions.

Issues of equity and diversity arose early on in my EdD thesis. A number of parents in my study only chose to home educate as they felt that they had no

other option. It was clear from the interviews that these families felt excluded and marginalised. In addition, my study differed from much other UK research into home education because half of the families interviewed came from ethnic minority groups, reflecting the population of the area where I work. In contrast, much other UK research has focused primarily on families defining themselves as Caucasian (See for example Fortune-Wood 2005). When I started this research I did not have a clear idea of what I would find but rather a vague feeling that the experience of parents home educating in my local authority differed from the experience of parents in much of the literature. My research indicates that a number of vulnerable families are pushed out of mainstream education into home education. Recent research into Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families would seem to support this. Many of these families are moving into home education following social exclusion and racial discrimination at school (Young People Now 2006).

Undertaking research into home education, which I would not have done had I not been undertaking the EdD programme, has made me aware not only of the complexity of many issues in this area but also of the range of experiences that parents bring to the decision to home educate. Ozga suggests that research in education is crucially important if it helps to:

...inhibit the misuse or simplification of research by policymakers, who denigrate or ignore research that does not support their chosen policy direction, while claiming to be committed to 'evidence-based policy-making'. (Ozga 2000 p2)

A key question in any research is in whose interests and for what purposes has it been done. I would hope that my research, at least in part, has helped to give a voice to parents who all too often have been ignored in the professional literature.

## Conclusion

Above all else the EdD programme has helped me to develop into a more critical and reflective practitioner. I am certainly far more aware of a range of issues around inclusion, diversity and equity. The course provided me with up-to-date knowledge on research and policy developments in education as a whole. My thesis gave me the opportunity to integrate theory with practice in the area of home education. For me bell hooks, one of education's more exuberant writers, sums up both my view of education and what I have gained from the course:

My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. Educating is always a vocation rooted in hopefulness. As teachers we believe that learning is possible, that nothing can keep an open mind from seeking after knowledge and finding a way to know.  
(hooks 2003 p xiv)

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

This thesis focuses on the experiences of families who for a variety of reasons find themselves outside of the school system. It is concerned with families in one London borough who have decided not to send their children to school and to educate them at home. The study examines the experiences of families who make a positive choice to home educate because of philosophical or religious beliefs but is particularly concerned with families who home educate following a series of difficulties with the school system, perhaps because their child has been bullied or because their child has been identified as having special educational needs. What this study aims to show is that the community of home educators is deeply divided. Those parents who positively choose to opt out of formal schooling because of religious or philosophical beliefs have access to a number of support systems. In contrast, parents who feel they have been forced out of the education system tend to be isolated and have little knowledge of how to access such things as public examinations. Within this group few parents initially understand the full extent of their responsibility. For example, many parents confuse the term home education with home tuition. This group of parents can end up doubly excluded both from schools and from the world of home education.

The study is not limited to research carried out in the UK but draws upon research from a number of countries, primarily the US, Canada and Australia. There has been less research carried out in Europe as a whole and the rest of the world because in some countries, such as Germany, home education is illegal. Home education can be defined as what happens when parents

choose to educate their child at home rather than sending them to school. The term 'home education' is used throughout this study as this appears to be the preferred terminology of UK home educators. The term 'home schooling', which is frequently used in the US, is unpopular with some UK parents as it seems to imply that parents are attempting to replicate schools at home (Home Education 2005).

In the UK, Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 (previously section 36 of the Education Act 1944) gives parents a choice as to whether to delegate the education of their child to a school or whether to carry it out themselves. Local authorities do not assist parents who home educate with teaching support or by providing any learning materials. Once parents choose to home educate, the responsibility of the local authority is simply to enumerate and to monitor that parents are providing a 'suitable and efficient education' (Section 437 [1] Education Act 1996). Such terminology is fairly vague and has only been more clearly defined in case law. In 1981, there was an appeal to Worcester Crown Court in the case of Harrison and Harrison v Stephenson. 'The term 'suitable education' was defined as one which enabled the children 'to achieve their full potential', and was such as 'to prepare the children for life in modern civilized society'. The term 'efficient' was defined as achieving 'that which it sets out to achieve'.' (Fortune-Wood 2000, Appendix 1). The legislation in this country pre-supposes that parents who opt out of schooling have the means to provide an alternative education. Nowadays, parents who home educate often make great sacrifices in terms of career and family finance as one parent has to be non- working. Such sacrifices, Arai suggests, may be the decisive factor in the future growth or decline of home education (Arai 2000 p214).

As national statistics on home education are not collected in the UK, there is no reliable way of knowing how many families home educate. It is estimated by the Department for Education and Skills that there are currently about 150,000 children being home educated (Scott 2006 p23). The exact figure is impossible to obtain as parents in the UK who choose never to send their children to school are under no legal obligation to inform anyone of their decision. A recent study in the US carried out by the National Center for Education Statistics (Phillips 2004) suggests that the number of parents home educating there is increasing. The current figure stands at 1.1 million students, a 29% increase on 1999. Whilst data is hard to come by, most studies suggest that home education is a growing phenomenon in the UK as well as in the US (Meighan 1997, Thomas 1998, Rothermel 2000, Fortune-Wood 2005). However, as Bauman states, writing about the US, 'home education is a subject of great fascination, but little solid knowledge' (Bauman 2002 p2).

Although a number of books and articles have been written on home education, the majority, particularly in the UK, focus on the benefits of home education as opposed to state provision. For example, Meighan (1997) titles one of his books 'The Next Learning System: and why home-schoolers are trailblazers.' Shute (1993 p11) argues that compulsory schooling 'is a waste of many pupils' time and a cause of lifelong misery for some'. Some recent publications on home education have been more concerned with practical strategies for home teaching than with ideological views. There is even a 'Complete Idiot's Guide to Homeschooling' (Ranson 2001) available on the Amazon website. It is primarily in the US that researchers have started to express reservations about home education. Riegel is one of a small number

of writers who argue that home education, far from being 'a vehicle for collective liberation', might be based on anti-democratic assumptions (Riegel 2001 p91-92). She expresses concern that often the focus of home education is on individual rights at times losing sight of wider issues such as the responsibilities that are associated with participation in a democracy. For writers like Riegel (as well as Apple 2000) home education has a political significance and is not simply a pedagogical movement. Both Riegel and Apple argue that the focus should be on revitalising and reforming state education.

Very little has been written about families who feel forced out of formal schooling. It is only in the last few years that the diverse nature of the home educating population in the UK has started to be acknowledged in the professional literature. As Monk states, 'It is important ... to recognise that parents who home educate are far from a monolithic group' (Monk 2004 p570). For example, a recent report on the provision for Traveller pupils found a growing trend for Traveller pupils to be educated at home. A number of concerns were expressed about this trend particularly 'the potential disparity between what are judged to be acceptable standards of provision for non-Traveller families and that for Travellers' (Ofsted 2003 p12).

One key group which may have been underestimated in UK research is that of the Christian Right. Rothermel, for example, writing about home education, states that 'the Christian Right does not exert a significant impact in Britain unlike its huge influence in the USA' (Rothermel 2003 p82). The findings of this piece of research would suggest that this may not necessarily be the case. The largest group home educating in this study did so because of their

religion. Almost half of the families (48%) home educated because of either Christian or Islamic beliefs.

Home education under the 1996 Education Act envisages parents positively opting out of the education system. Around the country many parents choose to educate their children at home for a variety of reasons. Historically, home tutors have been available to the wealthy for hundreds of years. Lord Redesdale, the father of the Mitford sisters, was violently opposed to his daughters attending school (De Courcy 2003). The author M M Kaye wrote that her early schooling was haphazard and that her parents were of a generation who thought that girls didn't require a proper education, as long as they read a great deal (Kaye 1990). Unlike the US where there are often well-resourced learning centres where parents can go for advice, there is little or no support in the UK. The home education population in both the UK and the US has changed over time. The dominant group in the 1960s and 1970s were those on the political left often influenced by writers such as Ivan Illich and John Holt (who will be discussed later in this study). As the century progressed this group was increasingly replaced, especially in the US, by practising Christians. Currently in the US the fastest growing group within the home education movement are Muslim Americans (Basham 2001). Added to this are the growing number of parents who feel their needs cannot be met in state education but who have no strong philosophical or religious beliefs.

The research for this study was carried out between December 2003 and March 2005. When the research was started in December 2003 there were 38 families with 55 children known to the local authority to be home educating. Of these 38 families just under half (17) were interviewed. During the course of

this study, a large number of families home educated for a short period of time and then returned to school or moved out of the area (see Chapter 2).

In this study, four key areas of home education are considered. Firstly, the reasons that parents give for home education are reviewed. Secondly, the educational experience of home education is considered including the methods of teaching that parents choose as well as the academic achievement of those home educated. Thirdly, this study examines the relationship between home education and state education and considers whether parents' own experiences of formal schooling influenced their decision to educate their own children. Finally, policies on home education are examined both in the UK and in other countries.

Thus, this piece of research will particularly focus on those families who have largely been ignored in the academic and professional literature, i.e those parents who home educate because, by and large, they do not know what else to do. In this study, 36 children out of a total of 58 home educated had previously attended school suggesting that some parents turn to home education because they had been experiencing problems with state education. Tomlinson, (1982 p8) in discussing special education, argues that it 'replicated existing social systems and that teachers frequently claimed that they were unable to teach certain children adequately because of cultural factors outside their control'.

It is possible that some vulnerable families are being pushed out of state education into home education because schools are struggling to cope with them. Parents frequently believe that they can choose which school to send their child to and that they can change school if things do not work out. This is

not the case in parts of the UK where schools are often full. Some parents keep their child at home in the erroneous belief that this will force the local authority to grant them their favoured school. As Tomlinson states:

It also needs to be said that choice is only real for some parents in some places. Not all parents are able or willing to avail themselves of the possibilities of or cope with the complexities of choice ... And in many areas of the country there is no possibility of choice. The rise in the number of appeals and in the numbers of disgruntled consumers who find they have no choice indicates the mismatch between ideology and practicality.

(Tomlinson 1994 p15)

Parents home educating because they had negative experiences of state education or because they could not get their child into the school of their choice may well feel that they did not 'choose' home education but rather that it was imposed upon them. If this turns out to be the case, then it will be seen that the community of home educators is, indeed, a deeply divided one.

The next chapter examines how the information for this research was obtained. It particularly focuses on the parental interviews that yielded so much information as to why parents home educate as well as their actual experiences of home educating.

## Chapter 2 – Methodology

### Introduction

Several methods of data collection were used in this study. As well as reviewing the literature, policies were examined and various databases were established. However, the main method of data collection was a series of interviews with parents. This chapter will examine the research process focusing particularly on how the interviews were conducted. It will examine how interviewing fits into wider research traditions and also how the data was judged and interpreted. Finally, there is a section on the theoretical perspective that underpins this study.

One of the reasons for choosing this research topic was that an early review of the literature indicated that few studies focused on parents who 'drifted' into home education. Of the children home educated in this authority, the majority had tried state education and found it wanting. Of the 58 children in this study, 36 had previous school experience. In addition, as an inner city area, with around 30-40 families home educating at any one time, this authority provided a relatively compact area for research. It is important to emphasise that this study only considered those parents known to the local authority to be home educating. If parents choose never to send their child to school then there is no legal requirement for them to inform the local authority. Currently, there is no way of ascertaining who all these 'unknown' parents are nor what their motivation is for home educating.

This study is primarily exploratory in nature and is particularly concerned with parents' perceptions and experiences of home education. 17 families, out of a

possible 38 families, were interviewed. Time constraints made it impossible to interview all 38 families. Grounded theory methods of data gathering and analysis were adopted. In this way, comparisons could be made and propositions developed. The fieldwork took place between December 2003 and March 2005. The main areas studied were:

- the reasons parents give for home educating
- the educational experience of home education
- parents' perceptions of state education
- policies on home education

This piece of research evolved over time. Initial visits to parents and early reading gave some indication of the areas to be explored. Early ideas developed further or were dismissed and new ideas replaced them. The focus increasingly centred on the two disparate groups that chose to home educate; those who did so for positive reasons and those who felt unable to continue in state education. Given the central role of parents in decision making, they were always the prime focus of the research. This study uses both quantitative (databases) and qualitative data (focused interviews) although the latter plays a far greater role in the research.

The London borough which is the focus of this study is a fairly typical inner city area. It has an ethnically diverse population and that diversity is also expressed in terms of faith. The largest religious group in the study comprises Christian families followed by Muslim and Hindu families. Like many inner city areas the majority of families in the area are on low incomes and unemployment is above average.

## Databases

Obtaining accurate data on home education can be elusive. Not all families register with the local authority and many families are transient, moving from area to area and between home education and school. Some families attempt to register as home educators whilst sending their children to small private unregistered religious schools. (At least six of these have been identified over the past three years in the area concerned.) Nevertheless several databases were established during the course of this research.

A first database recorded details of home educating families at a particular point in time (December 2003). This included details of age, gender, when home education began, last school attended and the reasons for home educating.

One feature that characterises home education in an inner city area is that the population is highly mobile. Many parents home educate for just a short period of time. In the academic year 2003-2004 sixty pupils came off the home education register. A second database recorded whether these pupils returned to school, moved out of the area, or simply reached school-leaving age.

All home-educated pupils receive a visit at least once a year from a consultant, employed by the local authority, to ensure that parents are providing what is defined in law as a 'suitable' education. Brief reports are written following the visit. These were examined and a comparison made of the education provided by those parents who positively opted out and who frequently followed a set curriculum, such as the Christ Centred Curriculum,

and those parents who felt that their children were pushed out of schooling. This information was set out in a third database.

Finally, a fourth database showed how many families with children in Key Stage 4 intended to enter their son or daughter for GCSE.

### **Interviews**

Interviewing was the main research method used in this study. As Guba and Lincoln (1981 p154) state, interviewing can frequently be 'the backbone of field and naturalistic research and evaluation'. Semi-focused interviews were the main means of data collection. Interviews were audiotaped and fully transcribed with identification details altered. Interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes. Parents were sent copies of the drafts of the transcripts and invited to check that these drafts represented what they wanted to say and to make any alterations or additions. Only one parent chose to make fairly substantial alterations to the transcript and this was primarily because he felt that he had not been clear enough about his views on Islamic schools.

Just under half (17) of all the families home educating in the local authority were interviewed. As far as possible I attempted to interview parents from a range of cultural backgrounds, from different religions and with different motives for choosing home education. I also aimed to include parents of children with special needs and parents of children who had been bullied. I interviewed one Roma pupil. I spoke to her rather than her parents. This was partly because of language difficulties (the family spoke Romani and Polish) but more importantly because in this instance, at 16 years of age, she, rather than her parents, made the key decisions about her education.

All the interviews took place in the parents' home. Despite being viewed as 'the face' of the local authority, I was invariably made welcome and offered refreshments. Parents seemed to welcome the opportunity to express their point of view. When I needed clarification, particularly in the area of religion, this was readily given. A Jehovah's Witness family, for example, provided me with a leaflet and a video about their beliefs.

At times I had to make it clear to parents that my role was a limited one. I could not, for example, provide teaching resources. Neither could I help them get their child into the school of their choice. However, if parents wanted information on procedural matters, where possible, I provided this.

Initially, the intention was to obtain a representative sample of parents by interviewing every other family on the home education register. In practice, this did not work out to be as straightforward as planned. The major difficulty was the fact that the home education population was highly mobile with many families moving on and off the register. For example, parents may have been unhappy with a particular school and chose to home educate for a short period of time whilst they sought an alternative. I did not attempt to interview families where there was the possibility of legal proceedings for non-attendance or where there were possible child protection issues (three families fell into this category). However, attempts were made to make the sample as representative as possible.

One issue that arose with regard to the sample of families interviewed was to do with gender. If the figures are broken down there is clearly an over-representation of boys.

### Gender of Home-educating Families

	Boys	Girls	Total no of Children	Total no of Families
All Families	30	28	58	38
Interviewed Families	18	6	24	17

This over-representation occurred purely by chance. It just so happened that the families that were available for a visit on the dates that I was able to visit tended to have sons. Gender does not appear to be a key consideration with families who home educate for religious or pedagogical beliefs or because of bullying or school choice. However, nationally, amongst pupils considered to have special educational needs more boys are identified than girls. My sample may therefore contain a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs than would generally be found.

As far as possible, questions followed the guidelines of Patton (1987 p22) and were 'open-ended, neutral, sensitive and clear'. Parents were guided through a set of predetermined questions. As far as possible, I attempted not to prejudge what the relevant issues might be in order to give parents greater involvement in directing the course of the interviews. However, interviewing is more than simply asking questions. As Corimer and Corimer (1979) write, active listening is crucial as this enables prompts and probes to be used in order to gain greater insight.

There are several advantages to this method of data collection. Firstly, it enabled a greater rapport between myself and parents than would be available in written responses to a questionnaire, for example. Secondly,

feelings and attitudes were far more apparent. Thirdly, open-ended questions meant that qualitative data could be elicited so that any new themes that emerged during the course of the interview could be followed up.

Although I came prepared with questions, in reality, parents were able to talk and expand upon the issues that were most important to them. This meant, for example, that if their child had experienced bullying at school and they wanted to focus on it, then they were able to do so.

The fieldwork took place simultaneously with a review of the relevant literature. Both initial reading and early interviews formed a basis for emerging theory. Attempts were made to ensure that the research was not simply a one way process. If possible, it was intended that parents might benefit from their involvement (if only at the level of putting them in touch with other parents with similar beliefs or experiences). This was not participatory research as the parents had no direct say in the overall design of the research. However, parents did have a significant impact on the choice of areas for exploration. On completion, copies of this study will be made available to all the parents who were interviewed.

Gaining access to parents, in general, was not problematic. My role in the local authority meant that I was already 'known' to the majority of parents. In one sense, I was doing 'insider research' in that I had contact with parents and a knowledge of home education as part of my work. In another sense, I was doing 'outsider research' in that I had never made the decision to home educate any of my own children and I was a paid professional 'doing a job'. Parents were initially approached by phone and asked if they were prepared to be interviewed. Assurances were given as to confidentiality. This initial

contact was followed up by letter and all the parents approached agreed to be interviewed. Achieving physical access, 'getting in' and achieving social access, 'getting on' (Cassell 1988) were not problematic. The research was underpinned by the BSA (1991) guidelines on good practice. Parents were reminded at the start of the interviews as to the remit and scope of the research so that consent was as informed as possible. Whilst maintaining confidentiality, the central role of parents in the research process was always acknowledged.

As Barton (Clough and Barton 1998) states, it is essential to engage with the question of 'voice' in educational research. This particularly applies to excluded groups. Research that empowers marginalized groups, even if only at the level of greater information, moves us further towards an inclusive society or as Giddens (1994) terms it towards a 'dialogic democracy'. The key questions to be asked are:

Why is the topic of research important? How were the topic and the research questions arrived at? What is (are) the purpose(s) of the research? For whose benefit is the research undertaken? Who owns the research?

(Clough and Barton 1998 p30)

As stated earlier, the parents influenced the choice of areas to be explored. For example, it was not until I interviewed the parents that I became aware of how important religious beliefs were to a number of them. Whilst I was aware that the debate around creationism had become very heated in parts of the US, I had not been aware of its importance to some of the parents involved in this study. Similarly, it was only during the course of the interviews that I began to realise the impact that bullying can have on an entire family.

Further issues centre around questions of power. To what extent was I viewed by parents as a 'visiting expert'? Did parents respond with what they assumed were 'required answers' or did they have their own definite views? The voices of parents from marginalised groups have often been ignored in education despite rhetoric around parental choice and involvement. All too often it is the discourse of the professional and the policy maker that gets heard and listened to. Parents of children who have 'drifted' into home education tend to have been on the periphery of decisions concerning their child. Power relationships between parents and schools are not always obvious and visible. It can, therefore, be difficult for parents to challenge actions and decisions that might have a profound effect on their son or daughter. However, the interviews conducted in this research gave parents an opportunity to express their views. This opportunity was taken up by all the parents approached.

Notwithstanding this, issues around gender, whilst not always explicit in the interviews, were certainly present. In both Muslim families, the husband made it conditional that he be present at the interview. It was only because I was a woman, doing the research, that I was able to meet and discuss issues with the wife. Most families operated along the traditional lines of the man being at work and the woman looking after (and educating) the children. If only one parent was present it was always the woman. Where the husband was present (in 8 out of 17 interviews) either they did not work or they took time off work to attend the interview.

## **Interpreting and judging data**

Grounded theory was particularly helpful when faced with the fact that the 'unstructured complexity of multiple realities renders a priori theorizing impractical' (Clarke 1999 p59). As stated earlier, description and analysis were integrated with the research moving backwards and forwards from the interview transcripts to analysis and back again for further examples and clarification. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) suggestion that the researcher codes the data and organises from this coding proved helpful. In this way patterns and themes started to emerge. Lincoln and Guba summarised this process as following:

What is at issue is the best means to 'make sense' of the data in ways that will facilitate the continuing unfolding of the inquiry, and, second leads to a maximal understanding (in the sense of *Verstehen*) of the phenomenon being studied.

(Lincoln and Guba 1985 p224)

In analysing and interpreting the 'texts' derived from the transcribed interviews I found that Scott (1990) provided useful criteria. He suggests that the researchers ask whether the text is authentic, credible and representative. Authenticity, refers to the text being genuine and from a reliable source. Credibility, whether it is free from errors and distortions. Representativeness, whether the data is representative of reality. These are all practical considerations that face any researcher.

The hermeneutic tradition is concerned with the theory and practice of interpretation. It is particularly relevant when dealing with the subjective nature of human behaviour. It brings us back to 'Verstehen' or interpretative understanding. The researcher has to enter into a dialogue with the text knowing that a text can have a different meaning when read by different readers. One issue for the researcher is how to give the reader an awareness of the subjective nature of the interpretation. Mishler (1990) proposes criteria

for examining the trustworthiness of an interpretation. He suggests that researchers should ask themselves:

What are the warrants for my claims? Could other investigators make a reasonable judgement of their accuracy? Would they be able to determine how my findings and interpretations were 'produced' and, on that basis, decide whether they were trustworthy enough to be relied upon for their own work?

(Mishler 1990 p414-41)

In writing up, claims have been made partly on the basis of research and partly through the relevant literature. However, the statements made by parents may well have a wider relevance. For example, the views of several parents as to the effectiveness of state education is certainly reflected in some of the literature. Texts would have been strengthened by detailed biographies of the parents so that their views could have been placed in context, but this was beyond the capacity of the current study.

In any research there is the issue of how authority can be claimed for statements made. If parents felt that their view might be used against them, dialogue would be limited. Sometimes the language that we use can unintentionally distort what we are trying to say. However, Habermas suggests that even if our ways of communicating are distorted then there is, nevertheless, within any dialogue:

a gentle but obstinate, a never silent although seldom redeemed claim to reason.

(Habermas 1979 p3)

This is crucial in situations where communication can be distorted. Habermas talks of an 'ideal speech situation' whereby both parties have an equal chance to engage in a dialogue that is not constrained. Whilst dialogue does not

always have to be egalitarian it does require reciprocity. Dialogue does not work and cannot occur:

...between those who want to name the world and those who do not want this naming – between those who deny other men (sic) the right to speak their word and those whose right to speak has been denied them.

(Freire 1972 p61)

At every interview I tried to convey to parents not only that their views were important but that they would be treated with respect. Parents who had made a positive decision to home educate were the most confident interviewees. They were both interested in and supportive of the fact that I was doing research into home education. Parents who had 'drifted' into home education needed to be reassured that I would not use anything that they might say to make their position more difficult. Once they had been reassured, they seemed to welcome the opportunity to express 'their side of the story'.

### **Intellectual and research traditions**

As always the rationale for selecting a particular research method has to be that it is suited to the research topic and the nature of the research questions. Since this study was primarily concerned with the views and perceptions of parents, qualitative methods were used. Ethnography, with its focus on documenting people's own insights, seemed particularly relevant. Parents often have a very different view as to what has happened to them when compared with schools and other professionals.

It could be argued that focused interviews do not always neatly fit into an ethnographic tradition, but as William Whyte states 'a genuinely non-directive interviewing approach is simply not appropriate for research' (Whyte 1982

p111). What is important is the degree of negotiation between interviewer and interviewee. There needs to be scope for the interviewee to bring in new material and to be able to answer in their own way. At no point were data collection and analysis rigidly separated as might be expected in a more positivist approach. Initial theory formulation was elaborated and developed over time in an interpretative way. What was important was that the interviews enabled the feelings and subjective experiences of the home educators to emerge. The areas for discussion, which I used to focus the interviews, were never intended to be more than a guide. Issues that were thought to be not relevant by the families were passed over and where a parent chose to speak in depth about one issue this, too, was perfectly acceptable.

As Vlachou writes:

Ethnographic methodology provides the space and flexibility to embrace the notion of cultural contexts and to grasp – or at least try to understand – other cultures on their own terms and to identify cultural patterns within the process of both continuity and change.

(Vlachou 1997 p3)

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) suggest that ethnography can have particular relevance to areas away from the mainstream of education. For example, there may well be a discrepancy between the views of parents and professionals as to what actually took place when a certain event occurred. This study looks to clarify the perceptions of parents as to how they became home educators. One of the questions that parents were asked was about their own experience of school, as this might have influenced their views as to what happened to their son or daughter.

Sara Delamont (1992) argues that ethnography includes talking to people in their own setting and can at times involve giving a voice to the 'unheard'. She also stresses the importance of reflexivity in social research. For her, the researcher needs to be 'constantly self-conscious about her role, her interactions and her theoretical and empirical material as it accumulates' (ibid p9). She argues that where qualitative researchers are continually reflective then the issues of reliability and validity can be addressed. This is not always easy to do, particularly when the researcher also works for the local authority as I did. At times, I found myself clarifying local authority procedures and therefore stepping outside of my researcher role.

I did not start the research with a theory or hypothesis that I wanted to test. I read about home education but felt that much that was written did not apply to the parents that I knew. Certainly, very few parents that I met were educating for pedagogical reasons, as some of the literature seemed to suggest (see Fortune-Wood 2000).

Epistemology both informs and is informed by research. In this study there is a dialogue going on that embraces both conversations with parents as well as an engagement with texts. With any qualitative study, theory is emergent and according to Glaser and Strauss (1967) should be grounded in the data that comes from the research. Theory thus follows research rather than preceding it. One of the main strengths of grounded theory is that 'Data collection, analysis and theory stand in a reciprocal relationship with each other' (Strauss and Corbin 1990 p3).

In the research literature very little has been written on parents who have found themselves unwilling providers of home education. This has been a

largely ignored aspect of education. This study will have some implications for school organisation and also for local authority policy and practice. Where significant numbers of children are not in school, this impacts on policies of inclusive education.

The term inclusion in the context of this study, is taken to mean more than simply locating pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools.

As Thomas and Vaughan wrote:

‘(It is) concerned with developing an education system in which equity is striven for and diversity welcomed’.

(Thomas and Vaughan 2004 ix)

For some pupils who are educated at home there are issues of exclusion and marginalisation. A feature of current education policy appears to be that at times contradictory messages are given. As Morley and Rassool (1999) wrote, issues around equity and effectiveness can converge or collide. School effectiveness can be taken to mean value for value under a conservative Government, whilst under a Labour Government it frequently refers to offering opportunities to disadvantaged pupils. Similarly the meaning of terms such as inclusion can change over time. Currently, for example, schools sometimes appear to be giving mixed messages as to whether to include or exclude pupils who have behaviour difficulties.

It is intended that this study should add to our knowledge of home education and the experience of vulnerable learners. It would therefore be advantageous if these findings were to be made available to a wider readership. Part of the challenge here may be the nature of the presentation to different audiences.

## **Theoretical perspective**

This study is particularly concerned with parents who home educate as a last resort. Therefore, the theoretical perspective of this research is focused on the inclusion/exclusion dynamic. It is concerned with the reasons why some parents operate outside of the education system. Goffman (1963) illustrates the way in which groups will tolerate individuals whilst they are perceived to be of use to the group. Similarly, individuals will stay within a group whilst they are getting something from it. If, however, they feel very dissatisfied they will frequently choose to leave the group. This is what appears to be happening to some parents whose children, for whatever reason, are struggling at school. These children may not have been formally excluded but the pressures were such that many parents felt that they had no option but to take them out of school.

Weber (1922) explored the ways in which societies create forms of what he referred to as 'social closure'. This happens when certain groups monopolise available resources. Weber used the term the 'included' for those groups accessing these resources and the 'excluded' for those to whom access is denied. The excluded form a category or categories that are 'outside', particularly in relation to economic or social opportunities.

Parkin (1979 Ch4) develops Weber's ideas further. He is concerned with how those who are excluded in turn exclude those who are excluding them. He examines how the excluded deploy strategies in order to resist the dominance of the excluders. Parents whose experiences of schools are so negative that they eventually decide not to send their child any more will attempt to operate outside of the system that, in one way or another, has failed their child. For

Parkin, this is a logical response to the power extended in a downward direction from the excluders. The excluded are simply trying to regain some power that can be exercised in an upward direction to gain access to resources. These attempts to influence the system and to gain greater access to resources Parkin terms 'usurpation'. Parents frequently wrongly assume that by not sending their child to school they will force the local authority to do something, either by offering another school or by providing home tuition and resources. In reality, once they opt out of the system, they have few rights and are largely forgotten. The DfES does not allocate resources to local authorities to support home education.

The ways in which parents find themselves excluded from the school system are subtle and complex. For Foucault (1991) the challenge is to listen to the voices of those perceived to be different or excluded. Parents who feel that they have no option but to remove their child from school and home educate them become the 'other' as far as the education system is concerned. In Foucault's terms they are transgressing the boundaries that others have imposed on them. Those that have the greatest difficulty in coping with the demands of the education system are treated separately and as deviants. A strong focus on social control frequently leads to the exclusion of those who struggle to conform. Foucault states that power influences every aspect of life creating hierarchies, domination and segregation. Foucault is important in that he focuses on the diffusiveness of power. Power is exercised in discrete and subtle ways. It does not always operate in a highly visible way. This means that individuals can feel compelled to conform even when they are not specifically aware of any disciplinary power. For Foucault, however, resistance can be viewed positively as representing challenge and energy.

Resistance... 'should not be seen so much as a weakness or a disease as an energy that is reviving' (Foucault 1991 p 289). Perhaps by opting out of a system that appears to be failing their child, parents are able to regain some degree of control.

Of key importance is how parents see themselves. For Giddens (1991), the self is made rather than inherited. We all create a set of biographical narratives that form the basis of how we view who we are and how we came to be where we are.

A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual's biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world, and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about the self.

(Giddens 1991 p54)

Giddens (1994) also writes of a 'dialogic democracy'. Educational systems often seek to include all pupils in order to help to create the morally and politically aware populace that Giddens envisages. The fact that some families choose not to send their children to school suggests that there is some way to go in creating a fully inclusive educational system.

## **Conclusion**

This study has been influenced by the writing of Glaser and Strauss (1967) on grounded theory, particularly, the notion that data collection, analysis and theory are in a reciprocal relationship. Its focus is a systematic enquiry into the motives and experiences of home educators.

Some difficulties arose during the course of the research. Firstly, I treated parents as a unit but several times during the course of the interview when I

was interviewing a husband and wife, one partner dominated, usually the husband. With the family that asked for alterations to the transcript I felt that the alterations reflected the husbands' opinions rather than those of his wife. This was a complex area and as I was unlikely to get agreement to interview husbands and wives separately this was not one that I could pursue.

The notion of power similarly cannot be ignored. To many parents I was the face of the local authority and therefore possibly to be treated with caution. In reality, once assured that the purpose of the interviews was to further research, I felt that most parents spoke with a high degree of honesty. None, as far as I am aware, felt inhibited about discussing their negative dealings with schools and the local authority.

Of key importance is the question as to why parents choose to home educate. It is this question that will be considered in the next chapter. This is probably the area where there is the greatest disparity between the findings of this study and research conducted elsewhere in the UK.

## **Chapter 3 – The reasons parents give for home educating**

### **Introduction**

This chapter examines the reasons parents give for home education. It will compare what has been written in the literature about home education with the findings of this research. Before we examine the literature and the research a word of caution is needed as to why there may appear to be contradictions both within the literature and between the literature and this study.

Firstly, the home education population frequently seeks anonymity. My research focuses on those parents who choose to make themselves known in one local authority. It is important to remember that if they have never sent their child to school they have no duty to inform anyone. There may be characteristics of this group of families, unknown to me, that are picked up in other surveys. For example, my research indicated very low numbers of parents who chose to home educate for pedagogic reasons. The group of parents who chose not to make themselves known might be those who chose to home educate for these very reasons and so could be under-represented in my findings.

A second explanation of inconsistencies is that, for some parents, their views as to why they home educate may change over time. A negative school experience or a failure to get their child into the school of their choice may be the initial reason for home educating. Several years further on, if they find home education to have been a positive experience, they may give different reasons such as, fitting in with their lifestyle.

Finally the date and the location of the research is significant. The reasons families in rural North America in the 1980s and 1990s gave for home educating cannot be compared, without qualification, to the reasons given by families living in an inner city area, in the UK, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### UK Research

A recent study by Mike Fortune-Wood (2005) studied one hundred and eleven families in the UK and examined why they chose to home educate. The majority of parents gave pedagogic or lifestyle reasons for their choice. The top three reasons in his survey were flexibility, preference to school and academic reasons. However, bullying and special educational needs also ranked high with religious reasons lower down the list.

In contrast, this study, albeit on a smaller scale and conducted in an inner city area, suggests different parental priorities. As stated previously, of the fifty-eight children known to be home educated, the main reasons given for home education were:-

<u>Number of families</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Number of Children</u>	
Religion - Islam	9	24%	17
- Christianity	9	24%	15
Pedagogy / Lifestyle	5	13%	8
Rejection of state education	5	13%	8
Special educational needs	5	13%	5
Bullying	3	8%	3
School choice	2	5%	2
Total	38	100%	58 children

(Appendix 3, Table 1)

If we unpick the figures further very few families gave pedagogy or lifestyle as their main reason for home educating. The majority of families who rejected

state education did so after a negative school experience. Very few families, other than those who gave religion as their main reason, never sent their child to school from the beginning. What these figures do not show is that frequently there was an overlap in the different categories. For example, several of the parents interviewed whose children had special needs also mentioned bullying as an issue.

Why then the discrepancies between this study and the Fortune-Woods study? In addition to the factors mentioned earlier, this study was of an inner city area whereas the Fortune-Wood study was of families across the UK. In the Fortune-Wood study the majority of the respondents defined themselves as Caucasian with low Asian numbers and no Black Caribbean, Black African or Traveller families at all. In contrast, over half the parents interviewed in this study were from ethnic minority groups including Asian, Black African, Black Caribbean and one Roma family. The sample of parents reflected the population of the London borough concerned. Secondly, much of the Fortune-Wood study was carried out on-line, whereas a number of families in this study did not have access to a computer. The inner city area studied is one of relative poverty with many families on annual incomes of less than £10,000. It is probable that the Fortune-Wood study covered families on a greater range of incomes.

Other UK research suggests a far greater interest in alternative education than has been found in this study. Webb (1990) interviewed twenty families with children over fourteen years of age. The two main reasons given in her study for home educating were an interest in alternative education from

reading books by such writers as John Holt and A.S Neill and school based problems arising from issues such as bullying and special needs. Why, then, a further discrepancy? Possibly, because the research was conducted fifteen years earlier than mine. Possibly, because, Julie Webb focused on pupils over fourteen years of age whereas my study focused on home-educated pupils aged five to sixteen. But, primarily I would suggest that, as with the Fortune-Wood study (2005) the population sampled was a very different one from mine. Three of the twenty young people in her study went on to Oxford University. This is not a comparable sample to the parents I interviewed in an inner city. Only a very small percentage of the young people on my database obtained five or more GCSEs. It is important that generalisations on home education are not made from samples that may not be representative of the home education population as a whole.

Paula Rothermel, (2002) also researching in the UK, found that about 50% of her sample had been home educated from birth and that 50% had been withdrawn from school. Those that home educated from birth did so primarily for reasons connected with lifestyle. She also suggests that whilst school dissatisfaction was an initial motivator for the other group, this changed as families increasingly became aware of the benefits of home education. The figures differ in my study with 38% of pupils home educated from the beginning compared with 62% of pupils being removed from school (it should be borne in mind that percentages can be unreliable with such a small sample).

One factor that all these studies fail to show is the large number of parents who home educate for a short period of time and then return to state education. If we examine the number of families that are taken off the home education database over three years we can see that for many families home education is fairly short term.

School Year	Families removed from data-base
2003-04	60
2002-03	39
2001-02	54

For example, during the academic year 2003-4, 60 children were removed from the home education database.

Destination	Number of Pupils
Return to School	38
Moved out of borough	19
School leaving age	3
Total	60

(Appendix 3 Table 2)

As we can see, the majority of children (38) returned to school. A sizeable number (19) moved out of borough and three young people reached school-leaving age. In the local authority concerned many schools are over-subscribed. Some parents are unable to gain a place for all their children at the same primary school and will home educate one or more of them until a place becomes available. Similarly, some parents home educate until a secondary school of their choice has a vacancy.

Thomas (1998) interviewed one hundred families in the UK and Australia. He found that the families split into two fairly equal groups; those who had never been to school and those who withdrew their children from school. He found no major differences between home education in the UK and Australia although Australian families appeared to have a greater awareness of alternative forms of education. His figure of 55% of children never attending school as opposed to 45% withdrawing their child from school are more at odds with this study (38% and 62% respectively) than those of the Rothermel (2002) study mentioned earlier. Thomas makes the point that the distinction between those home educating from the beginning and those withdrawing from schooling is not always clear cut. Where parents withdraw their child soon after starting school they may well have been predisposed to home education in the first place.

Where the findings of the Thomas study are clearly in line with this study are in the fact that today's parents are far removed from the stereotypical home educator. Thomas found that there was 'hardly a mention of the 1970s doyens of deschooling - Illich and Reimer' (ibid p40). The studies diverge, however, over the importance of religion as a factor in parents choosing to home educate. In Thomas's study it was 11% of families whereas in this study it was 48% of families.

### **Research outside the U.K.**

Jacqueline Luffman (1997) writing about Canadian home education suggests that parents home educate for mainly religious, moral and pedagogical reasons. She suggests that home education is particularly attractive to

parents who wish to incorporate their own religious beliefs and values into all areas of the curriculum (ibid 1997 p32). Some parents want to spend as much time as possible with their children and to create, in their home, a positive learning environment. Parents often feel that home education can give children a degree of protection from the competition and peer pressure of school life.

Chris Gerrard (1993) also writing about Canada, quoted by Luffman (1997) writes that the decision to home educate 'can be triggered by specific circumstances or experiences in public schools'. He also suggests that some parents decide to home educate because their child does not fit in or because they start to fall behind academically. What frequently happens is that families home educate for a short period of time when problems arise in school. When it is felt that the problems have been overcome the child returns to school. This might partly explain the apparent high level of turnover in families home educating.

Jane Van Galen (1988), researching in the US, distinguishes between groups that she terms ideologues and pedagogues. The former comprise the large number of religious conservatives who are not necessarily anti-school but are frequently concerned about what is taught there. Home education for this group tends to be fairly formal and often follows a commercially produced religious curriculum.

'These parents have specific values, beliefs and skills that they want their children to learn, and they do not believe that these things are being adequately taught in any available school'. (Van Galen 1988 p 55)

Pedagogues, on the other hand, are parents whose focus is child centred and informal. They do not have confidence in the ways that schools teach.

'These parents are highly independent and strive to take responsibility for their own lives...they share a respect for their children's intellect and creativity.  
(Van Galen 1988 p 55)

Van Galen thus found two main reasons behind the decision to withdraw children from school. Firstly, when what was being taught contradicted the values and beliefs of parents. Secondly, when parents believed that their children would be harmed by the structure and pedagogy of schools. Van Galen, like Gerrard, also acknowledges that home education is often triggered 'by specific and unique circumstances'. In her article, she indicates that some parents chose home education because it offered a personal solution to difficulties that their child was facing in school. At the time this often appeared to be the only solution available to parents. She discusses one family where their seven year-old son was labelled emotionally disturbed by a teacher with a rigid attitude when he struggled to fit in. They withdrew him from school. Overall, whilst Van Galen's classification is useful, it does tend to simplify the complex range of reasons why parents home educate.

Davies (2005) draws on data from Ontario, Canada and views decisions to home educate as part of a wider expansion in private education with many parents 'simply seeking a superior form of education' (ibid p3). Whilst he views home education as part of the school choice movement he suggests that it does not fit neatly into neo-liberal ideology as many parents make considerable financial sacrifices to home educate and may not be seeking economic rewards from education. He suggests that home education is

becoming more diverse and that it is no longer dominated by what he terms as 'experimental unschoolers' and religious fundamentalists.

A key finding in Davies's research was the emphasis that parents place on their children's uniqueness. Parents sought 'a customised experience to enhance a child's personality, idiosyncratic talents and sense of self' (ibid p13). What many parents wanted was to find an education that reflected their own personal values. As one mother put it:-

'My second youngest daughter has never been to school. She's so precious, I could never, I call it contaminate. If I put her in school she'd be contaminated. She just so precious and innocent...' (Davies 2005 p14).

Davies suggest that the motivation for some parents to home educate might be part of a wider 'intensive parenting' movement, with parents increasingly demanding educational alternatives to match their children's particular talents. He feels that some parents may be retreating from the competition and rigor of the current education system and seeking out 'a kinder and gentler form of schooling' (ibid p22). This certainly echoes the sentiments of some of the parents in this study. However, it is important to remember that families home educating for pedagogic or lifestyle reasons were few in number in this study, just five families out of thirty eight (13%). What is hard to judge is the extent to which seeking 'a gentler form of schooling' was a secondary motivation for those who chose home education for religious reasons or for those who rejected state education.

## Findings

### i) Religion

In this study perhaps the most straightforward group are those who chose to home educate for religious reasons. Of the fifty-eight children on the database, thirty-two children came from families that gave their main reasons as religion. Of this thirty-two, seventeen children came from Muslim families and fifteen children came from Christian families, including several Jehovah Witness families. Almost all the children had never been to school. One family had sent their child to school for just a short period of time. The reasons for choosing home education were clearly stated by the group.

*'I have always thought that my role as a mother was to do this. As practising Muslims this is part of our belief, that it is the parents who nurture and teach the children. The man is traditionally the breadwinner, so he'll go out and work. The mother stays at home looks after the property and teaches the children' (MB/AB).*

*'We had a Christian experience and we wanted that passed on to our children. That is the focus of our education. We wanted a Christian ethos to be fundamental to their education' (FO/SO)*

For some families, had there been a school that reflected their own religious belief then this would have been their preferred choice rather than home education.

*'A school teaching the national curriculum combined with subjects such as Qur'aan, Arabic, Islamic studies, within an Islamic environment, meaning close observation of Islamic laws such as avoiding that which is not allowed in Islam, e.g. free mixing of older boys and girls, no singing etc. The inclusion of enjoining good manners upon the children also firms a firm basis for constructive learning. I find this especially important, as I would not like to be teaching my children one thing at home only for it to be undone at school'. (HI/SI)*

*'Nothing is really perfect in this world. If there was such a school that followed my own beliefs then yes, I would have chosen it because it would have given me more time for other things, as home educating*

*has been very time consuming. But I have enjoyed it. I enjoy learning'.  
(LB/SB).*

Most of the parents who had never sent their child to a school were convinced home educators from the beginning. Some of the parents knew each other and there appeared to be support networks stretching across the authority to support parents of particular religious groups, such as, the Jehovah Witnesses. One parent who pulled her child out of infant school had strong religious beliefs and misgivings about the curriculum. The fact that books such as the Harry Potter stories, with their focus on magic and the supernatural, were discussed in school was a matter of concern. However, it was a series of bad classroom experiences resulting from what appears to be poor teaching that finally pushed her to make the decision to home educate.

*'His teacher said he hadn't done a lot of work so I looked through S's book and I saw that there was a lot of blue pen in his book – an awful lot of blue pen. He was just having to copy. I know it's the first term but S is a bright kid. If you ask him to write a word phonetically he does it and you'd be able to understand it'. (SA)*

As has been stated the findings of my research are very much at odds with some other UK studies. For example Mike Fortune-Wood states:-

...Only twenty-two families out of two hundred and sixty-three (8.3%) gave religion as a reason for home educating in our survey. Although it is known that there are small faith-based home educating communities in the UK who are unwilling to participate in research conducted outside their own community, none-the-less it can be said with confidence that home education is not primarily a religious phenomenon in the UK.  
(Fortune-Wood 2005 p36)

In contrast to the 8.3% in the above survey, 48% of the parents in this study gave their main reason for home educating as religion. His suggestion that the proportion of parents who home educate for religious reasons is much lower in the UK than the US is not born out by this study. Religion including

evangelicalism may be a much greater force in UK home education than has previously been realised.

ii) Pedagogy/Lifestyle

Amongst the parents interviewed in this study none fitted readily into the 'experimental unschoolers' group. When parents were asked about background reading no one mentioned books with an ideological or pedagogical theme. The vast majority of parents stated that they got their information from the internet. (This is discussed more fully in Chapter 4.) Where a book was mentioned it tended to be of a practical nature. This matches the experience of Davies (2005) in Canada. On searching the database of a Canadian bookseller he found sixty books on home-schooling. Fifty-two of these focused on practical advice on how to home educate. Only one book made any reference to John Holt and unschooling (ibid p8).

Only five families (eight children) gave pedagogy/lifestyle as their main reason for home educating. Three families had initially sent their children to school. Mrs T had previously thought about home education and revisited the idea when her two sons appeared not to be thriving at school.

*'We noticed a change in the children....They were lacking in enthusiasm. They were irritable and impatient with each other....Educating the children at home was not a new idea, we had discussed it for years'. (JT/NT)*

For Mr and Mrs A the trigger for home education was the difficulty they had in reconciling the demands of state education with their son's play rehearsals and performances which they felt were an equally important part of his life.

*'At the time L was performing in 'Whistle Down The Wind' in the West End and the headmistress of his school was being somewhat*

*obstructive. He had been granted his licence, but she could not seem to understand that he needed to rehearse as well'. (LA/JA)*

It was 'someone in the local authority' where they lived at the time, that contacted the family and suggested home education.

*'You are perfectly capable of teaching them yourselves. Why don't you? We thought what a wicked idea. I think it was the best thing we ever did'. (LA/JA)*

iii) Rejection of state education

Only five families (eight children) gave the rejection of state education as their main reason for home educating. However, this is a considerable under-representation of the many families unhappy with state education. In all groups, whatever reason families gave as their prime one, there was also dissatisfaction with state education. (The relationship between home education and state education is discussed in Chapter 5.) Of the five families that gave it as the prime reason two groups were apparent.

In the first group two families had very clear academic concerns. They felt that their children were not being sufficiently challenged and were not receiving enough individual attention at school. These concerns were also expressed by Mr J whose main concern was bullying:

*'To be honest with you I am not very happy with this. I have been here for thirteen years and I have mixed with a lot of educated people. This is my second home but education has gone down and down. If I had known, I would never have brought my children here for an education but now I am stuck with it, what can I do? (JJ)*

Amongst many of the parents interviewed there was a perceived decline in standards of education. Lubienski (2000) writing about the US argues that negative opinions about state education and the decision to home educate are often not simply 'the product of independent, individual choices' (ibid p210) but can be as a reaction to 'influential groups promoting moral mandates for home schooling' (ibid p209-210). Certainly, some religious

conservative groups in the US urge parents to remove their children from school. Lubienski refers to a number of Christian organisations that argue that 'All Christians should immediately withdraw their children from government schools' (ibid p210). Schools are viewed as unsafe places where there is moral decay and where children do not succeed academically. These sentiments were echoed by some of the parents interviewed. (See interviews FO/SO and HI/SI Appendix 2.)

In the second group three families chose to home educate after they had been involved in disputes with the local authority. One father had been banned from his children's school for violent behaviour. In two instances there had been investigations over child protection concerns. This small group of families was known to the Education Welfare Service before they withdrew their children from school. (As mentioned in Chapter 2 where there was the possibility of legal proceedings for non-attendance or where there were on-going child protection concerns, the families were not interviewed.)

#### iv) Special Educational Needs

Five families who home educated had a son or daughter with special educational needs. One child had been diagnosed with Autism, one with Aspergers Syndrome, two had Physical Disabilities and the final child had Dyslexia. All five families had originally sent their child to school. Ms T stated that E had coped in primary school but found things increasingly difficult at secondary school.

*'He couldn't read or write and he wouldn't mix. Socially he did not get on, he had a lot of 'run ins' with other kids as well as adults. I would take him to school, but by the time I'd get in, he was home... He was just getting so frustrated he was becoming violent. They stated that he was dyslexic, I sort of got advice on dyslexia. He was getting himself in*

*such a state, he was not sleeping and he was just withdrawing right into himself, which wasn't good for him. He just would not communicate with anyone... I went into his school and I even had a meeting with them stating that he was dyslexic and he had difficulty communicating. That was totally ignored because the next day one of the teachers stood up and asked him to read in class knowing his difficulties. The thing was he did not get on with the teachers and they did not get on with him'. (ET)*

Mr H experienced two difficulties when dealing with the LA. He tried to get his son into a single storey school because of his physical difficulties but failed. Subsequently, following an incident of bullying he refused to send his son back to school and started home educating.

*'We went to the school (of our choice) and they turned around and said "We can't get you in here... We asked about another school. I wrote numerous letters regarding his education but there was never any good come back. I was told by someone at the Education Office that he could go to one school but I was told that he would need eight-foot arms to come down the stairs because of his poor motor skills'...'He was doing very well until he was bullied. We decided to take him out of school after he came out of school hurt. We took him to the doctors and I had to hold him down to have a cut on his eye glued up. He was also kicked on his leg and he had lacerations. I refused to send him back to school'. (BH)*

Mr and Mrs MB tried mainstream school for their son with autism but withdrew him, as he became increasingly unhappy.

*'He went to Primary School. What I found was that when his mum or I went to pick him up at the end of the school day, he was very distraught - he wasn't very happy at all. He was very withdrawn, very upset and sometimes he wouldn't even recognise us. We would stand in front of him trying to take him home and he would refuse to move. I was really not happy about how his day ended at school and what he might have gone through in a school day. It must have been an over-stimulation of stuff, stuff that he couldn't cope with; noises - children's noises that must have made him withdraw even more. That's generally how his school experience was. This is not to say that he didn't enjoy any moment in school at all. He must have had his good times; he must have had some friends, but because of his condition he didn't make too many friends. So to summarise, that's how his school life was'. (AMB)*

v) Bullying

Three of the families cited bullying as the main reason for pulling their child out of school and home educating. However, bullying came up as a concern in a number of interviews although it was not always given as the main reason for home educating.

Mr J was upset not simply because his son was hurt at school but also because the school did little to investigate what had happened.

*'When he came home he had this black eye. Nobody has done anything about it to date. We went to see the doctor and we went to see the teacher. The teacher involved denied it... I have lost complete trust in her.'* (JJ)

Mr and Mrs H felt totally frustrated with how the school handled their daughter's bullying until they felt that as a family, they had no option but to remove their daughter from the school.

*'I've lost count of how many times we went up to the school to tell them what was going on. We followed school procedures obviously. L was physically attacked, verbally attacked, pushing, shoving, and name-calling. Every time it happened we went up to the school and we told them who it was, what had gone on and we were just basically shooed away. The aim was to re-integrate L into the school and have a mediation situation with the bullies. We were told "This would pacify the bullies and it may well end up with them all getting on". This we obviously were willing to do. But by that time L was too terrified. She did not want to face the bullies, she did not want a meeting with the bullies. Because she had reported the bullying they had got back to her saying "Right you Snitch". In the meantime the school said to L "We're going to put you in a room and talk about this with the bullies". This was just not the right process.'* (LH)

For the Roma pupil it was issues concerning one student that triggered her determination to be home educated.

*'It was one student. The person was on drugs and I was sitting in his seat and we had a fight. The teacher took no notice, and I just went out of the class. Neither the teacher nor any of the other teachers said anything. No teachers responded. The only person in the whole school who responded was the nurse and she wrote a report. After that day I didn't go back to the school because if the teachers don't make a response where they can actually see you they won't respond if*

*something happens outside the school. Even if I were to tell them they wouldn't do anything at all. (EK)*

A recent study commissioned by the DFES found a high level of home education amongst Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families. In a survey of 23 local authorities just over one third of young people registered as home educators came from these communities. The main reasons given for home educating were social exclusion and racial discrimination by schools. (Young People Now 2006)

Some of the pupils who were bullied also had special needs. For B, who was diagnosed as having Aspergers Syndrome, life at school had become increasingly intolerable.

*'Then he had his Walkman stolen... He then told me about other things that he had experienced like name calling in the corridors... Two weeks later a girl attacked B in the classroom. She stabbed the inside of his head with a pen and then dragged the pen down to his collarbone and chest. Now he has a 2-inch scar by his nipple...I felt so angry and upset that the teacher had been in the classroom and done nothing. I showed them the tee shirt and said that both parents should have been called and B should have received medical attention. I then said that B would not be returning to the school, as it was not safe'. (BE)*

vi) School Choice

One group of parents who did not always appear in the interview sample were parents who chose to home educate for a short period of time at secondary transfer. This was when they were unable to get their son or daughter into the school of their choice. Many of these parents home educated for a matter of weeks at the beginning of September whilst waiting for a place at their favoured school. Two parents who wanted a very over-subscribed school, where places were never likely to become available, continued to home

educate. These parents tended to have wider concerns about their child's education and were not prepared to accept any alternative school.

Whether families who keep their child out of school for a few weeks, whilst keeping them on a school waiting list, corresponds to what is usually considered home education is debatable. Certainly, legislation is vague in this area and the DfES regards such decisions as local decisions to be made by each individual local authority.

### **Conclusion**

In examining why parents chose to home educate, what became apparent in this study was that the majority did so because they were dissatisfied with state education. For many parents it was because of their religious beliefs, for others it was because of poor school experiences. A number of parents felt 'forced out' of state education believing that they had no alternative but to educate at home. The impact of religion as a reason why parents home educated seems to have been hugely under-estimated in much of the UK literature.

The motives of home educators are complex and varied as parents may be motivated by more than one factor and their reasons may change over time. The views of writers such as Chris Shute (1993) and Roland Meigham (1997) who see home education as a radical alternative were not supported by this study. None of the parents interviewed mentioned any education thinker or philosopher.

Perhaps the key reason for discrepancies between this study and other pieces of research, may come down to the sampling process. Most studies on home education contact parents through various home education organisations. Not all parents belong to these organisations so it is difficult to know how representative they are. If more studies were conducted, based on geographical areas, perhaps it would be possible to obtain a more balanced view as to why parents home educate. That having been said, it is important to remember that the views of some parents may be very difficult to obtain especially where they choose not to make themselves known either to local authorities or to home education organisations.

The next chapter considers the ways in which parents chose to home educate, the effects of religion on this, the methods used, the social aspects of home education and the academic achievement of young people.

## **Chapter 4 – The educational experience of home education**

### **Introduction**

The educational experience of home-educated families is the focus of this chapter. It will examine methods of home education, looking in detail at religious groups as they comprise the majority of families in this study. It will also examine the social aspects of home education as well as the academic achievements of the young people involved.

### **Methods of home education**

Traditionally, home education has been viewed as innovative and radical with parents seeking a varied way to educate their child. For example, Thomas (2002) researching in the UK and Australia suggests that what works in schools does not readily transfer to the home. Thus, home educators 'find themselves pioneering new educational approaches, nearly always less formal ones' (ibid p1). Thomas lived with a home educating family for a week and found that 'there was no timetable or designed programme of sequential learning activities with a planned curriculum' (ibid p6). What struck him most was 'the constant opportunity for informal learning through social often incidental conversation' (ibid p6). Thomas subsequently interviewed a number of parents and found that many of them relied on informal learning from the beginning and were influenced by writers such as John Holt and John Dewey. Even if parents tried initially to imitate school they soon moved to a more flexible arrangement. Thomas suggests that in school the curriculum determines what is taught and learnt and that the sequence of learning is structured in a logical way. He states that in contrast when

children are home educated and learn informally they are able to determine what is learnt.

Fortune-Wood (2005) also researching in the UK found that when he surveyed home education the overwhelming majority of parents favoured flexible, autonomous and project based practice. Some parents mixed educational approaches to produce their own unique methodology that suited their own family circumstances.

In his study only 7 out of 277 families followed the national curriculum as fully as possible. 179 families responded that they did not follow it at all. Fortune-Wood also found that two thirds of home educating families did not use a timetable whilst the remaining third used one flexibly. Similarly, his survey showed that only 10% of home educators used curricula style textbooks on a regular basis.

Once again the findings of the above studies are very much at odds with the findings of my research. When the local authority monitoring reports were analysed, the following results were found: -

Total No. of Families	Use of a Timetable	Use of a Computer	Use of Curricular Style Text Books
38	34 (90%)	29 (76%)	27 (71%)

(Appendix 3, Table 3)

Thus 90% of families used some sort of timetable and 71% used curricula style textbooks produced by publishers such as: - W H Smiths, Letts, Collins and Heinemann. Almost a quarter of families made no mention of having or using a computer. For some this may have been a matter of choice but for others on low incomes it would have related to the cost. In many ways the

findings of my research are far more in line with US research than that in the UK. This is probably because in the area of my study there were a high number of families in home educating for religious reasons. Fortune-Wood (2005) suggests that the responses of this particular group are very different from other home educators. In his study over half of families (57.2%) who home educated for religious reasons did so in a structured way compared with 12.5% of all respondents. Fortune-Wood suggests:

It is reasonable to conclude cautiously that there is a good indication of a significant difference in the educational styles employed by those who choose to home educate for faith-based reasons. It appears that such families tend to be more structured in their approach than those who do not home educate for reasons of their Christian faith (Fortune-Wood 2005 p56).

Van Galen's (1986), research identifying two broad groups of home educators 'ideologues' and 'pedagogues' is again useful. Ideologues being those families who wanted their children to learn fundamentalist religious doctrine and who held 'a conservative political and social perspective that placed the family at the centre of society and strongly emphasises individual freedoms' (ibid. p55). Pedagogues, as the name suggests being those families who home educated primarily for pedagogical reasons. These families rejected the formal practices of conventional schooling 'Spontaneity and creativity (were) valued more highly than getting as far in a book as one "should" be' (ibid. p60).

What is particularly interesting about Van Galen's research is that the two groups used very different methods to home educate. Ideologues were primarily concerned with teaching their children specific knowledge and values. Home education tended to follow the same pattern as schools with much of the day focused around commercially produced textbooks and

workbooks. Some parents in Van Galen's study used Christian distance learning programmes, such as the Christian Liberty Academy. Van Galen suggests that although ideologues have broken from mainstream schools this has not been matched by any such break from the ideology of formal education. Apple (1983 p151) argues much the same when he suggests that individualisation is superficial if the goals and methods of education are defined by others. Ideologues tend to reflect formal schooling in their own practice. Where they differ is in substituting their own ideology.

Van Galen's study has particular relevance given that the largest group, by far, in my study were home educating for religious reasons, 48% compared with 13% home educating for pedagogical or lifestyle reasons. My research showed that the majority of parents followed traditional teaching methods. Goodlad (1984) and others have written about 'the soporific, textbook driven curriculum' (quoted in Van Galen p66). In the inner city area that is the focus of this study there is a paucity of bookshops. This might partly explain why a number of parents looked to W.H. Smith for resources:

*'I just went to WH Smiths and bought some workbooks. (BH)*

*'I got a really good book from W H Smiths called 'One to One: Educating Children from 0-11'. It's a really lovely book. It just laid things out in a very basic way and even if you hadn't been to university you could cope with it. It brings you back to basics – about how you learnt to read and count. It is a really good guide'. (JT/NT)*

Certainly, the reliance on commercially produced textbooks and workbooks suggests that the notion of 'Home-schoolers as trailblazers' (Meighan 1997) may not always be the case.

## Information and the Internet

If we examine the responses of parents, we find that some have high expectations as to the responsibilities of their children in home education. Mr J worked during the day whilst his wife cared for a young family. He expected his teenage son to organise his own learning based on books borrowed from the library. (This did not happen and his son eventually returned to school):

*'It's a bit difficult for him, we have fixed these hours for him but unfortunately he can't stick to these hours and I am not happy with the productiveness.'* (JJ)

Similarly, when Mrs T decided to home educate, it was her son who assumed responsibility for finding out further information:

*'I took E over to the computer shop because he likes to go over there with his mates and I told him go on the 'Ask Jeeves' website on education otherwise. Anyway this thing come up so he asked me if he should get it printed. So I said 'Yes please' and I've read all about it'.* (ET)

Web sites were a frequently used resource when parents wanted information on home education although one parent felt that the information was incomplete:

*'We have looked at web sites, but regarding what you are allowed to do, we really did not know that much. Until we had our first meeting with you, we weren't really aware of what to do. The web sites do not actually tell you what curriculum is used or what subjects. Now when everybody asks me, I can tell them what you have told us. They are 'gob smacked'! It is totally not what they expect to hear as web sites do not give that information. But there is other information where you can contact certain numbers or get help in using books. But the sites do not explain about teaching or the freedom you have to teach. This is a shame because it would put a lot of people's fears to rest if they had this information'.* (MB/AB)

The Internet also gave parents the freedom to use resources from abroad:

*'American sites tend to have more resources and help for home educators than British counterparts'.* (HI/SI)

The increasing use of the Internet again reflects trends in the US. It is estimated that between 93-94% of home educators in the US have access to a computer (Basham 2001 p9). This compares with the 76% of this study. Use of the Internet can enable parents to individualise the curriculum to meet the needs of their own family. The Internet provides both a range of educational material on line as well as contact with other home educators.

In Canada some states provide new technology to support home educating parents. Thus, in British Columbia each home educating family can receive a package of support worth up to \$4,000. This provides 'a computer, a CD Rom, Internet access, a selection of software and ongoing on-line assistance' (Basham 2001 p10). Families in this study, in common with families across the UK, received no such support.

## **Religion**

According to Basham (2001 p6) in the US by the mid 1980s 'most home schooling parents could accurately be described as part of the Christian Right'. He suggests that these parents formed 'a homogenous, deeply religious, socially conservative sub group' (ibid p6). Livni (2000) quoted in Basham suggested that 75% of home schoolers were practising Christians. However, in terms of religion, home education in the US is not simply confined to Christian groups. Research suggests that Muslim Americans are the fastest growing sub-group within the home education movement (Welner and Welner 1999). These trends have clearly been reflected in this study.

## Muslim Families

For many parents their religious beliefs underpinned how and what they taught. Mr and Mrs Bh felt that as Muslims they were responsible for their family:

*'As for the family unit Allah says that every man is a shepherd for his flock. You know that people are under his rulership, his subjects. You know the father is responsible for his family, his wife and his children. Our belief means a lot. The family unit is very very important for the stability of the children, for the confidence level and everything. Hence the eating together and the doing things communally together'.  
(MB/AB)*

This corresponds with an article by Fzeelah El-Sawah (2006) on home education and the Muslim community. The Islamic Home Schooling Advisory Network (IHSAN) was established in 2000 to help Muslim families home educate. Families who are 'unhappy with the state schooling system' (ibid p27) contact IHSAN through the Internet or by word of mouth. Families felt that home education helped to address 'dissatisfaction on the moral teaching where the school system is concerned or the teaching of theories which contradict parental beliefs 'as fact' (ibid p27). Many parents in the article felt that home education also addressed the negativity that pupils encountered at school because they were non-white and/or Muslim. Parents in the article also expressed dissatisfaction with the school curriculum which they felt taught 'a white Christian view of the world'. (ibid p28)

Mr and Mrs B, parents of HI and SI, decided to home educate from very early on. Ideally, they would have liked their children to have attended an Islamic school but not just any Islamic school:

*'A school of choice would be a suitable Islamic school. Many of the so-called 'Islamic schools' do not adhere to the basic principles of Islam and make unsuitable compromises and innovations into the religion. I aim to protect my children from radical and extreme interpretations of*

*Islam otherwise they would inevitably grow up with these views. So I have to be very careful as to who teaches my children and what they are taught. I also feel that most of these schools fall short of the standards I expect to be taught to the children curricular wise'. (HI/SI)*

Whilst being aware of the legislation concerning home education Mr and Mrs B followed a fairly conventional path in their actual teaching:

*'I have read the home education act. It has been explained that there is no rigid structure for education nor is it legally obligated for one to send one's child to school or to follow the national curriculum. What is required is that the children have the ability to communicate within their main community. I have been mainly using 'Schofield and Sims' with H since preschool and he has begun Key Stage 1. So he has in effect been following the national curriculum. I have supplemented these workbooks with other workbooks such as 'Letts', 'NAPE' and 'Learning Rewards'. (HI/SI)*

Thus, Mr and Mrs B took a fairly traditional route when it came to how their children were actually taught. They followed the National Curriculum and did not seek to provide any sort of alternative education. What underpinned what they taught was their Islamic beliefs.

### **Christian Families**

For Christian families as with Muslim families their beliefs underpinned the way in which they approached home education. For Mrs O:

*'When we became Christians it meant that our life would then be led in a particular way. Schools seem to have lost this ethos, morning assembly, for example, does not have a particular reference to what we know to be the truth. For us the only option is to gather other people like us to work together'. (FO/SO)*

In the US the debate over the teaching of evolution has been going on for a number of years. Creationists believing that God created the Earth and all living organisms. A more recent version of creationism is Intelligent Design which argues that the complexity of earth can only be explained by an intelligent designer or creator. Officially the teaching of creationism in public schools was outlawed in 1987 when the Supreme Court ruled that using

religious materials in science lessons was unconstitutional. However, the debate continues in many states such as Missouri, Arkansas, Alabama and Kansas around the doctrine of Intelligent Design which does not always have direct references to God. (Goldenberg 2005) The Christian parents interviewed had a wide variety of beliefs but for some creationism was a key issue:

*'The local church schools are still not religious. They teach evolutionism as fact rather than just as theory, and I think that this outlook is prevailing in most subjects; they should have freedom to teach creationism, while giving their pupils some information about evolution'. (LB/SB)*

Christian families also tended to seek out teaching materials that reflected their religious beliefs:

*'Most of the work set is from America. I use some American books, but I'd like more British. In the beginning I had some of the Beka Books (Pensacola Christian College, Florida) in America, but as we get towards GCSE I have been using books from Oxford University Press, Collins and so on'. (LB/SB)*

*'I went to S where the ACE (Accelerated Christian Education) programme is based. I needed to know what it was all about. Was it a school? Was it an actual building? I met another mum. I met the head of the school. We spoke and I asked how it worked'. (SA)*

*'I went to a mother and toddlers group and met some other people there who were home educating. We learnt about the Christ Centred Curriculum'. (DC/HC)*

Van Galen (1988) suggests that parents who home educate for ideological reasons are not necessarily opposed to the structure of formal education. Often what is most important to the religious parents is to transmit particular values and knowledge. The way in which this is done often reflects what happens in many classrooms, with a focus on structure and the use of textbooks and workbooks. There are a number of websites that enable

parents to download materials, often at a cost, almost all of them emanating from the US.

The Accelerated Christian Education programme used by several families is a typical example (Lighthouse Christian Academy 2006). It states that 'Training children to understand and practise Godly Christian character lies at the very heart of the ACE ministry and curriculum' (ibid p1). The programme is highly structured and its Word Building course includes the following features:

- Students are taught and drilled on pronunciation
- Parts of speech are reviewed and drilled in various activities
- Drills include forming tenses of verbs and plurals of nouns (ibid p7)

The ACE programme also enables students to take the Stanford 10 Achievement Test to track their child's learning.

Bob Jones University, also sells home education materials. 'For one low price you get all the BJ Home Sat programming in every grade for your entire family' (Bob Jones University Press 2004 p1). Home education for religious families is not a cheap option. As Mr and Mrs R, Jehovah Witnesses, state:

*'I think each child must be given an amount of money. I suppose they are provided with books and have the opportunity to go swimming,...(but we have to) look for books and software and information so that he can go to museums. We have to pay for these and there are no concessions.'* (JAR)

Mr and Mrs R were not the only parents to raise issues of funding. The loss of one parental salary in order to home educate often meant that difficult decisions had to be made when it came to the purchase of such things as curriculum materials.

## Non- religious families

Davies (2005 p16) suggests that many parents view home education 'as a menu from which to choose an assortment of pedagogies, with the aim of finding that which suits one's child whether structured or not'. Certainly, when we examine the comments of non-religious parents we find a great variety of responses. These responses relate to the reasons for home educating. Parents home educating for pedagogic reasons often tend to favour less structure. Parents who home educate because their children had poor school experiences often, at least initially, attempt to emulate the more formal side of education.

Mrs T pulled her children out of infant school when neither seemed particularly happy. Although initially she tried for formality this fairly quickly changed:

*'I tried to do everything formally. I tried to make my kitchen the classroom, but I thought to myself that this can't work – as I'm sure a lot of people have discovered. I then realised that we couldn't do it this way and we had to clear our minds of the old ways and we then had to work in a way that was liveable...I empathise with them and we do a lot of practical things, but when it is time to sit down and go over what they have learnt they do have to write it down and show that they have understood. There is probably not as much sitting down and writing as they would have done in school, but I don't think necessarily that is the way it should be done anyway'. (JT/NT)*

For Mr and Mrs M.B, whose son had a diagnosis of autism, home education gave them the freedom to pursue learning in their own setting:

*'We decided that his needs are one-to-one and that it should be with very familiar people with non-judgemental attitudes, not forcing anything onto him, taking time, being very flexible. This means a long duration of time, time to play with him, letting him do the leading. We probably will follow him most of the time and then take up his lead, go with him and play his game and then finally take him to us for a brief period'. (AMB)*

They felt that their son was making greater progress than if he had been attending school:

*'One the positive side we have a list of things that he's doing now that he wasn't doing before. His sentence construction and his functional communication have improved vastly. That's a huge step and he wants to socialise as well. If he wants a game – which is social communication, he does that. Recently he has also started to talk about abstract things – 'it is very hot, it's cold', 'it's hot so let's have the fan on'. Then he would put the fan on. But he'll also ask for weird things like 'daddy show me your teeth' which shows all sorts of communication basically'. (AMB)*

For Mr and Mrs A:

*'It has been an absolutely positive experience and a complete joy. If the kids have had an audition or I have needed to go to the hospital the kids have volunteered to work on Saturdays or the holidays'. (LA/JA)*

However, the families who struggled most to home educate tended to be those families 'failed by the system' i.e. the families who felt forced to educate at home. For them, continuing to send their child to school had ceased to be a viable option. These families often had unclear expectations as to what home education really meant. Mr J eventually sent his son back to the school where there had been a bullying incident but ideally he would have liked a private education:

*'I would not choose home education. I would not recommend home education to anyone. I know because I had this experience.'* (JJ)

Similarly, Mr H stated:

*'I would rather that B had gone to the school of our choice. It just never came up. It's a bit sickening. I have had to ask friends for books and paid out a lot of money for his education. He's had to be self taught'. (BH)*

Several of this group of parents had not fully understood the difference between home education and home tutoring. The lack of contact and support from the local authority came as a considerable surprise to them. As EK

stated when she pulled out of secondary school following a classroom incident:

*'At the time I was convinced that it was the best thing I could have done. After a while I realised that I would not be home tutored...I decided I would go to any other school'. (EK)*

EK eventually returned to the secondary school she had left.

### **Social aspects**

Webb suggests that 'ample opportunities exist for the home educated child to meet and make friends with people of all ages and interests through involvement in community groups' (Webb 1990 p164). Similarly, Hill argues that 'few home schooling parents want to isolate their children' (Hill 2000 p23).

According to Arai "the most common question which homeschoolers hear from bureaucrats, educators, teachers, family and friends alike is "What about socialisation?" (Arai 1999 p2)

Not all parents in the survey mentioned social activities but of those that did there appeared to be a divide between families who home educated because of a belief system whether religious or pedagogic and those families who felt pushed out of state education.

Certainly, amongst religious groups there existed a number of formal and informal networks. (On several occasions when I visited families to interview them they had already heard about what I was doing from other families). Mrs

C had no problems with social activities:

*'We meet up with other home educators and do extra-curricular activities together. They have swimming lessons and we organise trips out or take them to the gym and things like that. It is obviously good to link up with people and sometimes they can recommend curriculum work'. (DC/HC)*

When Mrs O expressed the desire to home educate she was encouraged by one of the Church leaders whose name was also mentioned by Mrs Bo.

Mrs O also met regularly with other families:

*'You cannot home work without networking otherwise you would be isolated. Every Friday we meet with other home schooled families. When our children needed to be coached we hired people. We have a close link that is supportive. I think that isolation is a killer. If you isolate yourself you can't share problems. We go on picnics, wall climbing, organise amusements together, for example'. (FO/SO)*

Mrs Bo made mention of the fact that she was part of a large Christian home educating group:

*We are part of 'a big group of Christian home educators. We have tennis coaching, gym and swimming lessons for the children. There was someone in the church who gave music lessons and we have been to the Music Academy'. (LB/SB)*

In contrast, Mr H, who had withdrawn his son from school after a bullying incident made no mention of having any contact with other home educating families. In many ways his home had become a fortress and he stated adamantly that:

*'I don't want him mixing with the rabble that walks down this road'. (BH)*

Similarly, LH had little contact outside of the house. Following a series of bullying incidents at school her parents stated that 'L has agoraphobia, she won't leave the house'. On a more positive note they did feel that:

*'L is learning now whereas before she wasn't because she was too scared even though she was going to school' (LH)*

In some ways, the parents of pupils who have been bullied become secondary victims. 'In approaching a school ... parents often have to deal with their own feelings of apprehension, fear and sense of unfairness' (Sullivan, Cleary and Sullivan 2004 p83).

## **Academic Achievement**

This is often a contentious area and once again much of the research can be challenged for its uncritical use of data. Luffman (1997) writing about Canadian home education points out that 'gathering reliable data on the characteristics of home schoolers can be difficult.' (ibid p41). The method most commonly used has been to distribute surveys to known home educators. Sampling bias is then a problem as some home educators prefer to remain anonymous. As Luffman states 'one of the most challenging aspects of home-schooling research relates to the difficulty in identifying the universe of home schoolers' (ibid p37). In Canada, as elsewhere, there is no reliable data on the number of families home educating. Luffman (p38) refers to a small survey of home educating parents attending a conference in Saskatchewan which found that 30% of parents did not register their children.

Ray (1994) in an earlier piece of research, also in Canada, suggested that respondents to surveys were more likely to be 'better educated, of higher social class, more sociable and more interested in religion than the general population' (ibid p56). In Ray's study home educated pupils took a standardised achievement test. The results showed that these pupils achieved well above the national average. However, this study like most studies on the academic achievement of home educated pupils was dependent on volunteers.

Similar issues arise when the academic achievement of home educated pupils are considered in the US. There is evidence that some of the main studies are based on highly selective samples. For example, Rudner (1999) studied a large group of home educated pupils using the Testing and

Evaluation Service of the Bob Jones University Press. For a fee, this university runs a testing service for parents, sometimes to satisfy state requirements. The fee could act as a deterrent to less well off families. The parents administer the test in their own home and the university scores and analyses the results. Rudner's findings show that most home educators are Caucasian, Christian, with above average incomes whose children are advanced in all subject areas. However, as Welner and Welner (1999) point out, Rudner's analysis has considerable limitations. The BJU data is unlikely to be representative of the total home education population given that:

The University's image, at least partially deserved, is of racial intolerance and religious orthodoxy (Welner and Welner 1999 p2)

The university 'prohibits interracial dating and marriage between its African-American and white students (Welner and Welner 1999 p3). It was not until after 1971 that African-Americans were allowed to attend the university. It seems probable that some home educating families would have chosen not to use Bob Jones university because of its racial stance. Similarly, the university is a Christian establishment. Its own website describes it as 'both orthodox and fervent in its evangelistic spirit' Parents who are not conservative Christians may well choose to use other establishments.

Thus Rudner's data, on US home education 'cannot be used 'to reliably compare home-schoolers' achievement levels with those of the general population or to describe the demographics of home-schoolers' (Welner and Welner 1999 p2). Yet several articles (see Basham 2001, Blok 2004) use Rudner's study to demonstrate that home educated pupils 'perform better in the cognitive domain i.e. language, mathematics, natural sciences, social studies' (Blok 2004 p39)

Research in the UK on academic achievement has similar limitations, partly because the home educating population in the UK, as elsewhere, is often elusive. Meighan (1995) built up a bank of information to underpin his findings on academic achievement. Much of his information was gained from questionnaires sent to members of Education Otherwise, a group that Meighan had been closely involved with over a long period of time. In examining both his own data and that of others in the field Meighan concludes:

The research evidence examined earlier placed home-schoolers ahead in conventional tests – on average, two years ahead of their schooled counterparts. (Meighan 1997 p46)

However, these conclusions may be based on a limited sample. Certainly, few of the parents that I interviewed mentioned organisations such as Education Otherwise.

Thomas (1998) acknowledges that:

...there are no reliable registers of home educated children kept by local authorities or an other organisation. Therefore, obtaining a representative group of families is out of the question. The difficulty is the greater because many home educators are apprehensive of outsiders. (Thomas 1998 p6)

These reservations need to be borne in mind when Thomas states that:

Home educators give us a view of education which, in many respects, is markedly different from what is on offer in school. What they have learned from their pioneering experiences has the potential to bring about the most fundamental change in education since the advent of universal schooling in the nineteenth century (Thomas 1998 p131)

Most academic researchers, along with the home schooling movements, stress the benefits of home education. Rothermel (2002) is no different in this respect. Rothermel spent five years studying home-educated families and her methodology involved a questionnaire survey of 419 of them. It is possibly the largest and most thorough piece of research done in the UK. She found that

home-educated children out performed their school-attending peers at primary age both in terms of academic potential and social skills. In the families that Rothermel studied only 14% followed the national curriculum whilst 58% did not use it at all. She concluded:

Overall, the home-educated children demonstrated high levels of attainment and good social skills. Common to all families was their flexible approach. The children benefited from parental attention and the freedom to develop their skills at their own pace. Families enjoyed strong bonds and parents were committed to providing a nurturing environment for their children.

(Rothermel 2002 p18)

However, the picture is far from clear. Allpress, a local authority inspector from Essex, (quoted in Scott 2006) estimated that of the home educating pupils known to him, only about 5% were doing very well. Of pupils in Years 10 and 11, he suggested that about half were not coping with home education. He was particularly concerned with the educational standards of those forced into home education because of problems at school.

Gabb (2004) suggests home education is most likely to be reported where it is successful. It may be that there are many more failures that are not reported.

He writes that:

In estimating the effects of home schooling, we may be in the position of a man who studies gambling by only looking at those who come forward and talk about their winnings (Gabb 2004 p16)

In my research parents were not asked about academic achievement and it is unlikely that they would have been willing, as a group, to having their children tested. However, it is possible to look at the pupils in Key Stage 4 to see which parents intended entering their son or daughter for GCSE examinations.

Pupils in Key Stage 4 (aged 14 years +)		
<u>Pupil</u>	<u>Reasons for home educating</u>	<u>Intention to enter GCSE</u>
KA	Religion (Muslim)	Yes
LA	Life style	No
LB	Religion (Christian)	Yes
BE	SEN / Bullying	No
BH	SEN / Bullying	No
LH	Bullying	No
EK	Bullying	Yes
FK, QK	Rejection state education	Yes
FO	Religion (Christian)	Yes
JR	Religion (Christian)	Yes
ET	SEN / Bullying	No

From this very limited data some patterns emerge. Of the eleven families all four of those home educating for religious reasons were looking into the possibility of entering their son or daughter into GCSEs. Of the five families who pulled their child out of the state system because of special needs or bullying only one expressed an intention of sitting GCSEs. Of the two remaining families the one that gave lifestyle as their main reason were not looking to enter their son. The other family, who had rejected state education, had turned to private tutors to prepare their son and daughter for GCSEs.

Entering pupils for GCSEs is expensive for home educating families. It is also a complex area where parents have to find an examination board and follow the detailed requirements of that board. Once again it is the parents that network, in this instance, those home educating for religious reasons, that have the advantage. Those parents who felt forced out of state education into home education, were often more isolated and tended to have the greatest difficulty in negotiating the public examination system.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has considered methods of home education and found little evidence of the flexible, autonomous education mentioned by Fortune-Wood (2005). Many families attempted to replicate the National Curriculum and purchased workbooks from shops such as W.H.Smith. This approach to education may have been a reflection of the high numbers of families educating for religious reasons in this study. The internet was a well-used resource by those families owning a computer. Religious families, especially, found that the internet enabled them to get hold of curriculum materials that reflected their own beliefs. Non-religious families followed a greater range of approaches. It was not possible to come to any definitive conclusion about the academic standards of home educated pupils other than it appeared to be, once again, the families who home educated for religious reasons who were most able to negotiate the examination system.

This chapter has shown the diversity of the educational experience of home-educated children. Parents in touch with other parents whether through religious organisations or groups such as Education Otherwise, were most able to make informed choices as to what was taught and learnt. Perhaps what came across most strongly, once again, was our lack of knowledge of the home education population. Many studies on home education are therefore likely to portray only part of the overall picture. One area where home-educated families are often united is in their hostility to state education. This will be the focus of the following chapter.

## **Chapter 5 – The relationship between home education and state education**

### **Introduction**

This chapter attempts to link what is often perceived to be a very personal decision to home educate with a wider political agenda that often prompts such decisions. What is useful here is C. Wright Mills' distinction between 'private troubles' and 'public issues'. Families often view their reasons for home educating as unique to themselves. This chapter will suggest that there is a clear relationship between individual decisions and the wider social context. As C Wright Mills wrote 'men (sic) do not usually define the troubles they endure in terms of historical change and institutional contradictions' (Mills 1959 p14-15). Education in recent years has appeared to be in a constant state of change and much of this change reflects struggles for power between competing vested interests. Mills referred to what he termed 'the sociological imagination'. For him this imagination was the ability to think in a wider historical, social and political context. This chapter aims to examine home education in such a context and thus to understand the interrelationship between individual families and society as a whole.

### **Family values**

During the process of interviewing parents several themes started to emerge. For example, a number of parents felt that home education provided the opportunity to consolidate family values. As Mrs O stated:

*'It has brought us closer together as a family'. (FO/SO)*

Similarly, Mrs T felt:

*' For the first formative years of schooling I would say that it is ideal that they should have as much time with their parents as possible. Once children get to the age of 12-13 they want to be independent. They should probably communicate more and spend time educating each other, once they can take their own lead. I think the parental input should be there for the first 10-11 years. I think it's awful that we live in a society where people have to spend so many hours away from their children just in order to support their life style'. (JT/NT)*

Such views are not unique to this study. Mayberry and Knowles (1989), in examining home education in the United States, suggest that whilst parents have complex motives for home educating there are common threads that underpin such decisions. On the basis of in-depth interviews in Oregon and Utah, they discovered 'an important commonality' (ibid p211). Parents felt that home education would 'allow them to maintain or further develop unity within the family' (ibid p209). Their article suggests that the decision to home educate might well be an attempt by parents to protect their families from the effects on state education of secularisation and modernisation. By home educating, families felt that they could minimise what they perceived to be the 'breakdown of the American family unit' (ibid p210). Home education was often a means by which parents could practise an alternative lifestyle.

'Home schooling, in this sense provides families with the means not only to protect their children from the ideologies, values, and practices of public schools but to actively preserve world views and meanings that offer stable guidelines by which to live. In other words, it allows them to actively construct and maintain the meaning systems through which they make sense of the world during a period of increased sociocultural pluralism, intense bureaucratization of social institutions, rapid cultural change, and increasing differentiation between private and public spheres of human activity'. (Mayberry and Knowles 1989 p221)

Berger and Berger (1983) examined how the role of the family changed over time as society became increasingly modernised and industrialised. The introduction of mass education took away some of the socialising functions of

the family. However, many families were reluctant to lose this role and demanded a role in providing guidance around educational, social and moral issues. This has become particularly true of those families home educating. For many parents the decision to home educate is rooted in a belief that they can provide a better educational and social environment than the state. The role of the family in the growth of public education can be viewed as the 'locale of demodernizing forces' (Ibid p106). Families have not simply assumed a passive role as the state increases its influence over education. On the contrary, many families have sought ways in which they can influence and participate in the education of their children.

For families where religious beliefs were fundamental, home education provided a means of transmitting key values. It could also be a means of protecting children from influences that were felt to be undesirable. As Mrs B stated:

*'I wish to protect my children from falling into extremes which is why I have to remain vigilant in who teaches them and what is taught. Many people/schools claim to teach Islam but instead teach their own views which are not authentic in accordance with the directives of Islam'. (HI/SI)*

Similarly, Mrs O speaking from a Christian perspective argued that:

*'I think the bottom line is that you as the mother and father participates in your child's education. A good Christian education is the perfect education for me... My third child was a late reader but we were able to tackle it working one to one and he became a good reader. What I think it was, was that he was not picking it up quickly. He was able to get more attention with us, more discipline and then God helped him and he began reading'. (FO/SO)*

What was particularly important for many religious families was to keep control over what was taught. Religious families tried to ensure that their lessons reflected the type of knowledge that they wished to transmit. Before

Mrs A withdrew her son from school she had increasing concerns about what was being taught in the state system:

*'You see S is a Christian and it's not that he just does whatever I am doing. He would be very uncomfortable if, for example, he was asked to read Harry Potter. I had asked if it was ok for S to go to another classroom when they were reading this book'. (SA)*

In a recent poll for the Center for Education Statistics in the US (Phillips 2004), 30% of families home educating stated that they wanted 'to provide their own religious and moral instruction'.

### **Perceptions of state education**

In an earlier chapter, the reasons that parents gave for home educating were examined and the most frequently cited reason was religion. Bauman (2002), researching in the US, posed slightly different questions and suggested that the key divide may be based on parents' attitudes towards state education.

*'In summary, if there are two classes of home schoolers, they differ mostly in terms of the degree to which they express negative attitudes towards the schools available to them now. No simple division exists between religiously motivated and academically motivated parents'. (Bauman 2002 p13)*

The growing trend towards home education can be linked to two other emerging trends (ibid). Firstly, the availability of on-line education and the growth of systems which allowed parents to develop their own provision such as vouchers and charter schools. Secondly, a move away, by some parents, from the increased standardisation of the curriculum and assessment. Bauman suggests that the role of schools in preparing students for employment in an industrialised world may be declining. Parents by home educating might be attempting to 'reclaim the schooling process' (ibid p13). By home educating, families might be attempting to make education more

meaningful and to gain some control over the system. At times the boundaries between state education and home education tend to blur. Thus in the US there is often a pressure on state systems to support home education. Florida, for example, 'has developed an extensive set of courses that can be taken over the Internet for high-school credit by homeschoolers' (ibid p2).

Arai (2000) suggests that home education in recent years, has found greater acceptance as an alternative to state education. In the past, home educators faced difficulties both with legal challenges as well as the negative perceptions of others. Because of such difficulties early home educators tended to hold strong philosophical beliefs. As the decision to home educate has become easier it could well be that many parents no longer hold the strong beliefs of those who home educated several decades ago. Home education may well be becoming more attractive to a much larger section of the population. Certainly, in this study this appears to be the case.

Arai interviewed 23 families in Ontario and British Columbia. His findings suggest that home educators in Canada may well have very different reasons for choosing home education than those in the US. For many families the decision to home educate did not follow a particular incident but was rather the culmination of experiences over a period of time. Often the process began with 'a general dissatisfaction with some element of the public school' (ibid p209). Many families felt that their children might be influenced by the poor behaviour of others and that formal schooling was 'detrimental to their children's well-being' (ibid p210). Parents were prompted to home educate by such things such as over-crowded classes, a lack of individual attention and

low academic achievement. Once they had removed their children from school, parents then felt that home education had strengthened family unity. Arai's findings are similar to those of Mayberry and Knowles (1989) although in Arai's study family unity was an unexpected benefit of home education rather than an initial motivation for it.

Arai's research found that home educators did not necessarily object to public education as a whole but were often concerned with certain aspects of it. One home education family stated:

*'School is the best place for my children, for all children, when it's working properly. But it isn't working properly now and that's because of the teachers and their unions'. (Arai 2000 p212)*

One finding in Arai's research in Canada is similar to one of my findings, in so far as few parents chose home education in order to follow an alternative lifestyle. In Arai's study, parents chose to home educate for a whole variety of reasons and their criticisms of formal education were similarly varied. In this study, the three criticisms most frequently given were poor teaching and lack of support for literacy, bullying and the lack of a religious ethos. Concerns were also expressed about competition with other children and issues around youth culture, violence and drugs.

Mr H, for example, felt that:

*'The children...spent all their time pushing drugs and 'effing and blinding'' (BH)*

Mr and Mrs Bh were also concerned with the social aspects of schooling:

*'There are always things that you think you would not want your children to go through or you would not want your children to get involved in' (MB/AB)*

For some parents, the world beyond their front door and their immediate community was perceived to be a dangerous place.

### **Parents' own experiences of state education.**

Some researchers have suggested that a key reason for parents choosing to home educate relates to the parents' own experiences of education. Knowles (1991) interviewed, in depth, 12 families home educating in Utah in the US in an attempt to explore the relationship between the parents' prior experiences and their decision to home educate. His study found that:

'An overwhelming number of parents in the study had experienced dysfunctional and disrupted family environments along with difficult and trying experiences in schools, which prompted them to compensate on behalf of their children for their own unhappy memories of youth. They particularly wanted to protect their children from the types of experiences they had had in school by creating warm, supportive family learning environments'. (Knowles 1991 p203)

For Knowles, the evidence 'overwhelmingly pointed to parents' almost uniformly thinking about home education in terms of compensation' (ibid p214). The parents in his study wanted to protect their children from some of the negative experiences that they had undergone. Parents wanted to ensure that their own children had a more positive experience. For some of the parents that Knowles interviewed, the image of the sort of family life that they wanted to create was very much in line with their religious beliefs. (About half of the families that Knowles interviewed were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints i.e. Mormons).

Many of the parents that Knowles interviewed had unpleasant memories of state education. 'Several of them had social or learning difficulties as students and remembered teachers as being too restrictive, prescriptive,

uncaring or even callous.' (ibid p217). Parents felt that the values which underpinned state education were often in conflict with their own values with some parents expressing concern over immorality and poor behaviour.

The parents that I interviewed were asked to say something about their own education. On the whole, their responses did not match the findings of Knowles (1991). Many of the parents interviewed felt positive about both their childhood and their education. As Mrs O stated:

*'Well, my mother did a lot for me and she made sure I was educated. I went to university, so I did have a good education. I got my degree and this has enabled me to teach my children'. (FO/SO)*

Where there was a clear divide it was once again between those parents who made a positive choice to home educate and those who felt pushed out of the state system. The clearest division between the various groups emerges over qualifications. Seventeen families were interviewed. Eight of these families were home educating for religious reasons. Of this eight, five of the mothers had attended university and two college. This is an extremely high proportion, especially as university education is a fairly rare commodity amongst parents in the inner city area that is the focus of this study. Mrs Bo. who wanted to provide an education that was underpinned by her religious beliefs explained:

*'I was brought up in the French speaking part of Switzerland. I was born into a farmer's family in the days when secondary education was hardly thought of. Then a neighbour sent one of his sons to secondary school. That gave my father the idea to send my older sister and then myself. I went on to university. We were the first generation to go on to higher education'. (LB/SB)*

Coincidentally, both mothers in the Muslim families had gone to university to study law but both left before completing their degrees. As Mrs Bh stated:

*'My education was really good... I went to university. I completed my first year law degree and then I became a Muslim and had to*

*leave...Even though I had a fantastic education I wanted to do this myself but more than anything it gave me confidence to educate my children'. (MB/AB)*

Mrs I similarly failed to complete her degree:

*'I have been educated in this country and have attained good GCSE and A-Level results. I began to study Law at university but grew bored of studying and left'. (HI/SI)*

In marked contrast none of the families who felt forced out of state education had gone on to higher education. The parents of BH had not found school particularly fulfilling and for Mr H much of his learning took place after he had left school.

Mr H:

*'I learnt maths whilst working on a fruit stall. I finished off six years in the air- force and I did an apprenticeship in wood-turning. I am one of the top craftsman'. (BH)*

Mrs H:

*'I did not like school at all. I found it very boring. The things I wanted to learn I could not learn. Because of options you could not choose, for example, three sciences. I wanted to be a nurse'. (BH)*

For Mrs T, whose son had special educational needs and had been bullied, her own education had been fragmented:

*'Well I didn't like school because I was epileptic. I missed a lot of school which was a shame, I did not go to school locally'. (ET)*

For Mr W, the experiences of his step-daughter were all too familiar as he too had been bullied at school. He felt badly let down by the secondary school that his daughter had attended and viewed state education as rigid and uncaring:

*'I left school at 15. I was a victim of bullying and in those days I was sidelined and put into a unit with tennis bats but no pens or paper...My education is all trade qualifications. I am not clever, I'm not daft but I'm*

*sensible...It's not just about educating a person. You're inside the mind, you're dealing with their character. It's about nurturing them. I felt that there was no emotion. If people did want to care they were not allowed to, it's about putting bums on seats. Rules are everything, everything must go through the education welfare officer. There was no time to stop the system'. (LH)*

Knowles (1991) suggested that parents often chose to home educate because of their own negative experiences, at home and at school, as a child. This study does not support this contention. Most of the parents who positively chose to home educate had pleasant memories of education and some had gone onto further education. On the other hand, those parents who had home educated as a last resort tended to have had poor experiences as a child. It is possible that for these parents their own poor experiences of formal education left them less well equipped to negotiate on their child's behalf when problems arose at school.

### **Anti-school sentiments**

Apple (2000) suggests that home education in the US is supported by a very positive media image. Whilst state education is frequently attacked in the media, home education is almost always portrayed in a favourable light. There are frequent stories in the US press criticising 'progressive education' and highlighting poor teaching in state education. Apple argues that such views reflect a period of reaction in education:

*'Many of our educational institutions are seen as failures. High drop-out rates, a decline in 'functional literacy,' a loss of standards and discipline, the failure to teach 'real knowledge' and economically useful skills, poor scores on standardised tests, and more – all of these are charges levelled at schools. And all of these, we are told, have led to declining economic productivity, unemployment, poverty, a loss of international competitiveness, and so on. Return to a 'common culture,' make schools more efficient, more responsive to the private sector. Do this and our problems will be solved.'* (Apple 2005 p271)

For Apple, education is 'a site of struggle and compromise' (ibid p272). He suggests that in both the US and the UK educational policy has moved to the right and become more conservative. Attacks on education can be viewed as part of this move and represents an agenda of attacking egalitarian ideals. For Apple, 'conservative modernisation' represents primarily a coalition of three broad groups:- neo-liberals, neo-conservatives and authoritarian populists. These groups have come together to form a general conservative movement that continually undermines state education.

In the UK, a similar discourse on education has developed. Harber (2005) suggests that the:

'two strands of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism came together powerfully in the Education Reform Act of 1988 which was designed to drastically reduce the power of local authorities'. (Harber 2005 p295)

Local management of schools was viewed as a way of increasing consumer choice whilst the National Curriculum was seen as a return to traditional standards. Over the past decade regular testing, published league tables and Ofsted inspections have become the norm.

It is the third of Apple's groups – the authoritarian populists that are possibly of greatest relevance to this study. In the US many supporters of home education are evangelical Christians. This was not thought to be the case in the UK. However, this study suggests that religion may be a far more significant factor in parents choosing to home educate than previous studies suggested.

There are possibly three key beliefs that unite religious groups that choose to home educate. Firstly, there is the fear of 'others'. Kintz (1997) writing about the Christian right in America suggests that, in some ways, the movement to

home educate is the educational equivalent of choosing to live in a gated community.

'As citizens worried about crime, taxes, poor municipal services, and poor schools abandon cities, the increasing popularity of gated communities, ... fortress communities, reflects people's desire to retreat. Further, they take comfort in the social homogeneity of such communities, knowing that their neighbours act and think much as they do'. (Kintz 1997 p107)

Kintz like Apple suggests that public schools are portrayed by the Christian right as being in crisis where:

'scholastic standards are in a free fall, budgets are mismanaged, campus violence is rampant, teachers are unqualified, classes are disrupted by protests, and students are barely able to read their own diplomas'. (Kintz 1997 p72)

Where evangelical Christians and other religious groups choose to home educate and to primarily interact with their own group then there is the possibility of society becoming increasingly segmented. Ofsted figures in the UK showed that evangelical Christian private schools were less likely to promote tolerance, harmony and respect for other cultures. (Self 2005). A second key area for religious home educators, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is a focus on family values. Parents choose to home educate because they perceive state schools and the wider world as places where the family has been undermined and traditional morality eroded. Finally, there is the issue of creationism. Certainly, in the US, there have been lengthy battles in a number of states with regard to the content of the curriculum and textbooks. In Arkansas and Alabama, for example, textbooks have to contain disclaimers on evolution (Goldenberg 2005). For several parents in this study the fact that creationism was not taught in schools was of great concern. For example, Mrs B (mother of LB and SB) felt that schools should give pupils

information about evolution but should also have the freedom to teach about creationism.

### **Democratic or anti-democratic assumptions**

In the literature on home education one writer, John Holt, is frequently mentioned as being particularly influential on the home education movement. (Although none of the parents that I interviewed mentioned him).

John Holt (1969) advocated home education as an alternative to schooling. Originally a teacher in private progressive schools, Holt focused on pedagogy and felt that schools stifled learning. Holt was a skilled observer of how children learnt and developed. In 1964, in *How Children Fail*, he published a critique of formal education. Holt argued that few children develop the huge capacity for learning that they are born with. He thought that school organisation worked against the ways in which children naturally learnt. Holt viewed much of the learning that took place in schools as fragmentary and short-term. He felt that many children were confused and bored in the classroom and compared the daily stress that some children face at school with battle fatigue. Holt tapped into a groundswell of dissent in the 1960s and, over time, he developed strong links with families attempting to home educate in a number of countries. He argued that:

‘What this all boils down to is, are we trying to raise sheep – timid, docile, easily driven or led – or free men? If what we want is sheep, our schools are perfect as they are. If what we want is free men, we’d better start making some big changes’. (Holt 1969 p34)

Holt wanted to see an end to compulsory education with pupils only attending schools to access resources when they chose to. For him ‘unschooling’ would always be more effective than formal education. For Holt, an imposed

curriculum meant that education focused on the government's agenda rather than that of the child:

'Your experience, your concerns, your hopes, your fears, your desires, your interests, they count for nothing. What counts is what we are interested in, what we care about, and what we have decided you are to learn'. (Holt 1969 p161)

Douglas (1991) critiqued some of John Holt's ideas. For her, the debate around home education was essentially one of democracy versus individualism. She suggested that Holt was too concerned with the rights of the individual and that home education, with its focus on personal autonomy, had a very different basis from notions of social participation in a democracy.

Riegel (2001) continues this argument. In writing about home education in North America, she argues that it is more than a pedagogical movement. She suggests that home educators 'have been aggressive in pursuing political and legal changes and have formed interest and support groups to further these ends' (ibid p93). Debates about pedagogy and curriculum reflect wider political beliefs. For Riegel home education is based on anti-democratic assumptions. Although acknowledging that the majority of those who home educate in North America are religious conservatives, Riegel is primarily concerned with those parents who view home education 'as a means of cultivating, new, more democratic forms of political practice' (ibid p91). Riegel wants to:

'reassert the central role of universal public education in democratic movement. The best strategy for progressives concerned with the hegemonic content of education is thus to work to revitalise and reform public education, not to abandon it in favour of home schooling'. (Riegel 2001 p93)

For Riegel individual rights need to be considered in a wider social context. For her the existence of society is dependent on the continuation of institutions such as schools in order that culture can be transmitted:

‘without some sort of common educational experience, it is unclear how a community can possibly develop and maintain the “inter-subjective meanings” that are crucial to its survival’. (Riegel 2001 p103)

Riegel’s main criticism of home education is that it is concerned primarily with the rights of parents to raise their children as they choose rather than with the rights of the child. In this way ‘progressive pedagogues are really no different from conservative ideologues in their reasons for home educating’. (ibid p 106).

Riegel suggests that when home educators criticise state education they are focusing on what is wrong and ignoring what is right. For Riegel, whilst schools can alienate and reinforce inequality they can also be places of inspiration and upward mobility. Whilst criticisms of state education need to be taken seriously, Riegel argues that ultimately:

‘The key to the creation of a more democratic world is better public education, not the abandonment of this system in the name of some libertarian utopia’. (Riegel 2001 p112)

Thus it can be argued that home education with its focus on individual fulfilment challenges notions of democracy and public good.

Apple argues that there has been a very persuasive use by the Right of the discourse of ‘individual responsibility’:

'A discourse that says "we" are responsible and moral and "they" (people of colour, the poor, immigrants, state employees, etc are not.' (Apple 2001 p xxv).

Apple suggests that where affluent parents in the US exercise their right of choice to remove their children from school, there is always the danger of increased racial and economic segregation. Thus one consequence of parents moving their children out of state schools could be the development of what he terms 'educational apartheid' (Ibid p xxii). According to Apple there has been a marked increase in parents choosing to home educate in the US. Many of these parents are seeking to 'protect' their children from the perceived ideological and moral dangers of state education (ibid p xvi).

### **Ideal education**

One of the final questions that parents were asked, when interviewed, was ' If you could choose the perfect education for your son or daughter what would it be?' Fifteen of the seventeen families interviewed answered this question and gave the following responses:

<b>Ideal education</b>	<b>No.of families</b>
Private education	2
Home education	3
The 'right' school	8
Part school / Part home education	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>

Two families would have chosen private education if they could have afforded it: For Mr R:

*'It's money. If I had the money I'd pay for his education. He does enjoy the company of other children – he is gregarious'. (JAR)*

Three families felt that home education was their ideal education. Although for some parents funding was an issue:

*'It would be home education. In a Utopian world I would get more support and supplies. This is why we do most of our work on the Internet. Everything is so expensive and the resources hard for us to fund. We would really appreciate some support'. (LA/JA)*

A surprising number of parents, eight out of fifteen would have sent their child to school if the right school had existed. Although some parents doubted whether this could ever happen:

*'She'd be in school with quality teachers and with small class sizes, but that's not going to happen'. (LH)*

Two parents specifically wanted a school that reflected their religious beliefs:

*'My first two children went to a very very good school, a private school, but it was not a Christian school. I think if it had been a Christian school with the ethos that we wanted that probably would have been the perfect school'. (FO/SO)*

Similarly Mr I, with two young children wanted:

*'A school teaching the national curriculum combined with subjects such as Qur'aan, Arabic, Islamic studies'. (HI/SI)*

The final group of parents wanted a combination of home education and schooling:

*'I know some people have done part school and part home education. I think that if you have the right kind of small group that might work quite well because that also gives you some time to yourself and takes away some of the responsibility'. (DC/HC)*

Interestingly, this is the one area in this study where no discernible patterns emerge between the different groups of home educators. Those who felt 'pushed out' of school had as broad a spread of opinions as those who 'chose' to home educate whether for religious or pedagogical reasons. Perhaps Mr MB, a parent of a child with special educational needs summarised the views of the majority of parents when he emphasised that what was of greatest importance was that his son learnt in a stress free environment:

*'The main criterion is that he should be happy in that situation, in that surrounding, in that setting. I don't believe, as a teacher as well, that people learn when they are in pain and are stressed. I have learnt that in a school situation, if someone is really upset, they are not going to learn in that lesson, maybe they will in the next lesson when they are ok, but if they are upset they are not going to learn. Settings are very important and that's why I believe that this path that we have chosen is the perfect one, because A is under no stress. He has not been placed in a situation where he has got to achieve and we don't prescribe anything. He leads us and we follow. In the process he just learns a few things like any kid learns. I also think that children's learning is a really strange thing and in a way we haven't understood that yet, we haven't understood how they learn. It is an amazing thing'. (AMB)*

Certainly, Mr MB had no doubts as to the wisdom of his decision to home educate. He felt very strongly that his son was learning more at home in a relaxed environment than he ever would have learnt in school.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to explore the complex relationship between home education and state education. Home education is viewed, particularly by religious families, as a means of transmitting family values. Values that are often felt, by them, to be lacking in state education. Perceptions of state education can be negative, with some families commenting on overcrowded classes and a lack of individual attention. Parents' own experience of education appears to be of less importance than might have been expected, with the exception of those families who felt forced into home education because of problems at school.

The media plays a key role in how state education is perceived, particularly, if as suggested by Apple (2000) it tends to portray home education positively whilst focusing on problems and failures in state education. Some religious groups encourage families to remove their children from state schools and

sensationalise what happens in them. For example, one US website suggests that much of what is taught in schools is objectionable to parents 'including the teaching of evolution, sex education for health and homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle for social studies' (Duigon 2006).

This chapter also briefly examines the work of John Holt and considers whether home education is a force for democracy as is often suggested or whether by opting out of state education it is anti-democratic. Finally, the views of parents as to what would constitute an 'ideal' education are considered. Surprisingly, for the majority this is not home education but rather the 'right' school.

C Wright Mills wrote about the importance of linking 'private troubles' and 'public issues'. Although parents have their own view as to why they home educate and what takes place in schools these views have been shaped by broader groups and institutions. The media, the church and various political groups have all played a part. However, whilst having concerns, that at times, state education is unfairly criticised I am not proposing complacency. The negative educational experiences of a number of families in this study suggests that more needs to be done to ensure that state schools are able to meet the needs of all children and young people.

In the next chapter, policies on home education are examined both in the UK and in other countries around the world. The influence of parents on policy formation is explored, as is the role of organised groups in home education.

## Chapter 6 – The policy process and home education

### Introduction

Whitty (1997) uses the metaphor of a 'vulture's eye' to describe what a wider sociological view can bring to the examination of educational issues. Vultures are able to focus in on one object whilst keeping the wider landscape in view. This chapter aims to examine policies on home education in just such a wider context. The chapter starts by examining policies on home education in other countries as well as in the UK. It then uses Ball's notion of a continuous policy cycle to focus on the extent to which parents can influence policy (Ball 1992, 1998) and it considers how some parents are part of organised groups that can exert a considerable influence on contemporary education policy. It examines how policies on home education can be reconciled with policies on social inclusion and social justice and finally, it explores whether home education, like schools, can be accused of replicating social inequalities.

The Education Reform Act (1988) heralded a number of changes in the UK education system. Schools became increasingly autonomous and there was a greater emphasis on parental choice and competition. By exposing schools to market forces it was hoped to increase their efficiency and effectiveness. Many of these changes have subsequently been consolidated by New Labour and recently there have been increases in private funding initiatives with the growth of 'Academies' and PFI. The growth of home education may partly be a reflection of this increased focus on parental choice and as Apple (2001) states possibly a key example of privatisation in its most literal sense.

Lubienski argues that there is a growing trend in a number of countries towards 'privatising parts of social life that were previously thought to cross into the public sphere' (Lubienski 2003 p175). Whilst claims about parental rights in education are valid, at times they can ignore the wider public interest. Similarly, whilst the state can and often does act as a means of social control and limits opportunities for certain groups, it can also provide opportunities for those disadvantaged by their home environment. If home education provides 'an ascendancy of individual advantage over common concerns' (ibid p176), then policies on home education need careful scrutiny.

### **Policies in other countries**

Policies on home education vary considerably from country to country. For example, in Canada education has traditionally been the responsibility of individual provinces. Therefore, across Canada policies on home education are highly diverse. Home schooling is legal in all ten Canadian provinces although each province has its own regulations concerning home schooling. In most provinces parents must register with the school board. Three provinces require that the curriculum be approved but no province requires that home schooling parents be qualified teachers (Basham 2001).

There is a similar mixed picture in the US, although home education has only been legal in all fifty states since 1993. Because educational administration is decentralised in the US, home education has similarly developed on a regional basis. Some states are very prescriptive requiring stage registration, home visits and that parents are certified teachers. At the other end of the spectrum there are states that do not even require parents to inform them of their decision. Some states permit home educated pupils to participate in a range of extra curricular school activities, such as sport and music. Some

states such as Florida and Illinois have developed a range of courses for families home educating that can be taken over the internet. (Bauman 2002).

In Australia, the eight states and territories each have their own laws regarding home education and, generally, home education is permitted. In Tasmania, for example, home educators traditionally kept a low profile and few registered. New legislation by the Tasmanian government has changed this and it is now compulsory for each child to be registered and monitored (Thomas 1998).

Across Europe, there is a similar variation. Some countries such as the Netherlands and Greece have legislation that prevents parents from teaching their children at home (Blok 2004). In Germany, school attendance is compulsory and home education is illegal. However, it is estimated that about 500 children are home educated (Spiegler 2003). Many of these are 'evangelically influenced Christians' (ibid p183) although parents with other motivations are also evident. There is inconsistency in the ways in which the German authorities react to home education. At times there appears to be tacit acceptance but at other times parents are prosecuted and some have been sent to jail. In Sweden, it is possible to register for compulsory education other than at school although few parents do so. National statistics show that about a hundred children are registered as being home educated each year (Villalba 2003). In other countries such as France, Finland, Austria and Belgium where home education is monitored by the state, there are small but growing communities of home educators (Petrie 2000).

In countries such as Spain and the UK the law makes it relatively easy for parents to home educate. In all parts of the UK, home education is legal and

part of a long tradition. Regulation of home educators is minimal with parents neither being required to register or to follow the National Curriculum. However, there are considerable variations in how local authorities interpret the law and there is little guidance from the DFES. Certainly, in the local authority being studied, the written home education policy has changed, partly, in response to new information and, partly, through challenges from parents. In many ways the growth of home education in the UK provides an insight into how some parents can influence policy, particularly when they feel empowered to challenge the status quo.

### **Perspectives on policy**

Traditionally, policy has often been regarded as top down and imposed. Certainly, legislation such as the 1988 Education Reform Act had a considerable impact on practice. However, home educators, as a group, can in no way be viewed as willing recipients of top down policies. Stephen Ball (1992, 1998) moves away from the traditional linear view of policy making and focuses on how policy is enacted with participants playing an active role. This model is more relevant to the experiences of home educators. Ball introduced the notion of a continuous policy cycle. For him:-

Educational policy is still being generated and implemented both in and around the education system in ways that have intended and unintended consequences.

(Bowe, Ball and Gold 1992 p19)

Ball's schema for analysing policy provides a flexible model, which, unlike more traditional models is not intended to be rigid. It establishes a set of contexts through which policy moves. For Ball, there are three main policy contexts. He starts with the context of influence where policy discourses are

constructed and where policy is initiated. Next, he focuses on the context of text production. These texts are often the product of both conflict and compromise. Lastly, there is the context of practice. What is important here is that Ball presents us with a view of policies being subject to both interpretation and re-creation. For Ball, policy is not something that 'gets done' to people. For him, the divide between the generation of policy and the implementation of policy is an artificial one.

Ozga (2000) suggests that educational policy as well as much educational research is all too often uncritical and taken out of context. For Ozga the 'bigger picture' is frequently missing. Thus studies at a local level will often ignore the wider structural inequalities of society as a whole. Ozga particularly focuses on how policy impacts on equality and social justice. She argues that analysis of educational policy is all too often one-dimensional. Like Ball, she suggests that policy should be examined in the context of social, political and economic interests. Putting policy into a political framework and locating it in a wider model of social life helps to contextualise what is actually happening when parents decide to home educate.

Policy can be influenced at a number of levels, by parents, local communities (such as Evangelical Christians), local government and national government. Some individual parents are able to make choices within a context of restraints and are not merely passive recipients of decisions made by external forces. Extensive home education networks exist to advise parents as to their rights and entitlements and how to challenge authorities where they feel that policy decisions adversely affect them. In the next part of this chapter, I use Ball's policy model to analyse home education policies.

## **i) Context of influence**

Many home educators are part of highly organised groups. Jacqueline Luffman (1997) writes of a number of support groups that can be found across all the territories and provinces of Canada. She also describes the Home School Legal Defence Association of Canada which provides legal support for parents.

Chris Lubienski (2000) in an article about home education in America writes of 'influential groups promoting moral mandates for home schooling'. He examines home educating in a context which he views as 'organised exit from public schools' (ibid p210, 211). In the US, the Homeschool Legal Defence Association (HSLDA) represents families who face challenges from courts or schools. Since the 1980s it has won a number of legal battles on behalf of home educating families.

HSLDA also maintains a national network of advocacy organisations comprised largely of religious homeschoolers. Additionally, many religious publishing houses support large lists of homeschool curriculum products. Even while homeschooling becomes ever more taken for granted as a legitimate educational option for 'normal' Americans, the organisational infrastructure of the US homeschool world remains dominated by conservative Protestants'.

(Stevens 2003 p95)

The HSLDA is, in fact, headed by conservative Christians and a large section of its membership comes from this group.

Perhaps the clearest articulation of the context of influence of home educators comes from Michael Apple (2000). As discussed in Chapter 5, he examines the anti-statist discourses of home educators as well as their claims about school failure. Apple sees home educators as part of a wider conservative and populist movement that is often closely linked to religious beliefs. One of

the things that helps to make home educators particularly successful as a lobby group is the often unqualified support that they receive from the media both in the press and on the television.

Its usual presentation is that of a saviour, a truly compelling alternative to a public school system that is presented as a failure. While the presentation of public schools as simply failures is deeply problematic, it is the largely unqualified support of home schooling that concerns me here. I am considerably less sanguine.

(Apple 2000 p62)

In addition, the internet provides many websites where advice and support to home schoolers can be found as well as examples of successful home schoolers. Certainly, some of the clearest interpretations of the law on home schooling come via the internet. The Education Otherwise website, for example, provides 'A Summary of the Law Relating to Home Education in England and Wales'. (Education Otherwise 2006)

Pressure for change in home education comes both as a response to world-wide influences as well as to battles by parents at a local level. Okuma-Nyström (2004) suggests that many recent changes in education are not simply the result of initiatives taken by the state but responses to pressures from above and below. Demands 'from above' include those that pressurise the state into producing globally competitive citizens. Demands 'from below' are often those that come from parents and organised groups. For example, parents who are religious fundamentalists may well have an overt political agenda and attempt to influence the curriculum so that it more readily reflects their own religious beliefs.

With improved communication systems and the movement of people and information, different parts of the world have become increasingly connected.

Thus, the development of global information technology has contributed to the development of a world-wide community of home educators. For example, information to support home education is frequently acquired through the internet. It is the internet that enables home educators to communicate with others around the world who share similar ideas and interests. Resistance to state education at a local level may well be a reflection of a more universal movement.

In many ways the world appears to have become smaller with the globalisation of capital and technological developments. Giddens views globalisation as:

The intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.

(Giddens 1990 p64)

Such a definition partly explains the close links that are forged between many home educators across the world. Often they are united by their common purpose which helps to overcome national religious differences. The fact that American religious curriculum materials are so readily available on the internet partly explains why a number of families in the UK use them.

## **ii) Context of text production**

Whilst the context of influence often relates to the articulation of narrow interests, the context of text production tends to be broader. Policy texts frequently seek to satisfy a range of different interests. Jacqueline Luffman, writing about Canadian policy noted that:

In the development of policy and legislation surrounding home schooling, some provincial governments have attempted to balance the interests of both parents and the ministries of education.

(Luffman 1997 p34)

Stephen Ball argues that policy documents should be viewed as:

the product of compromises at varying stages (at points of initial influence, in the micro politics of legislative formulation, in the parliamentary process and in the politics and micro politics of interest group articulation). They are typically the cannibalised products of multiple (but circumscribed) influences and agendas.

(Ball 1994 p18)

Thus policy can be viewed as the outcome of political struggles. These struggles are often determined by the group that is most able to articulate their ideas. If the current home education policy in the area being studied is compared with one produced in 1997 there are considerable differences.

(Appendix 1).

Both policies were produced by officers working for the local authority. The 1997 document is concerned primarily with procedure. It tells parents how, upon receipt of a request for home education, an education welfare officer will visit the home. The purpose of the visit being to ensure that 'the request is genuine and, where the child is currently in a school, not simply a protest at the way the school has been meeting the needs of the child' (1997 Home Education Policy). The policy states that the child will remain on the school roll until the education department confirms that the parents can provide an adequate standard of education at home. The policy is relatively straightforward and easy to read.

A close reading of the 2005 policy reveals a very different text. The tone is defensive and there is obvious concern that the policy might be challenged in

court. The first paragraph describes in detail the relevant sections of the 1996 Education Act. The second paragraph 'recommends' that parents complete a Home Education Information Sheet but stresses that there is no obligation on parents to do so. The third paragraph explains that the education department will seek to arrange a home visit but again stresses that parents do not need to co-operate with the process. The final paragraph explains what happens if home education is deemed suitable and what if it is not. The 2005 document is less clearly written than the earlier document perhaps because the new version was partly drafted by the local authority Legal Services anticipating a possible legal challenge by a parent.

As Ball suggests, policy statements are the textual result of the discussion and dispute of different voices. The text is a reflection of the struggles and compromises of those who participated in the process and even when written will continue to be subject to interpretation:

Practitioners do not confront policy texts as naive readers, they come with histories, with experience, with values and purposes of their own, they have vested interests in the meaning of policy. Policies will be interpreted differently as the histories, experiences, values, purposes and interests which make up any arena differ. The simple point is that policy writers cannot control the meanings of their texts. Parts of texts will be rejected, selected out, ignored, deliberately misunderstood, responses may be frivolous, etc. Furthermore, yet again, interpretation is a matter of struggle.

(Ball 1992 p22)

Certainly, a group such as Home Education UK that runs a large website and produces the journal *Home Education*, cannot be accused of being a 'naïve reader'. It frequently negotiates with local authorities to develop what it judges to be legally supportable policies (Home Education 2006).

The change in policy between 1997 and 2005 reflects a reconfiguration of power and in this area of education. Parents have acquired an increasing influence. Morley and Rassool (1999) suggest that such empowerment is embedded in the discourse of parental rights and choice. Certainly the discourse of choice and consumer power is attractive to parents who may well have felt powerless and frustrated in their dealings with local education authorities. However, not all parents are able to express their voice so forcefully. Research into parental choice (Bowe, Ball and Gewirtz 1994) demonstrates how parents' cultural capital and social class backgrounds are key elements in their success in challenging the current education system.

In analysing policy texts the work of Roland Barthes is helpful:-

Literature may be divided into that which gives the reader a role, a function, a contribution to make and that which renders the reader idle or redundant, left with no more than the poor freedom to accept or reject the text.

(Quoted in – Hawkes 1977 p113)

The first example Barthes considers to be 'writerly'. Here the reader is invited to join in and work with the author. The second he refers to as 'readerly' and this more accurately reflects both policy statements on home education. The intention of both policies appears to be to reduce creative interpretation by parents. This is particularly true of the second policy written at a time when parents, probably across education as a whole, were becoming increasingly litigious. A 'readerly' text such as the 2005 one discomforts the reader and leaves them simply with the option of acceptance or rejection.

Much of the discourse on home education focuses on issues of individual rights. Parents argue in terms of their right to home educate, their responsibilities as parents and the academic achievement of their children.

They fight strongly for what they perceive to be any infringement of their right to the education of their choice. Lubienski (2000) suggests that this is part of a broader trend whereby that which is private is valued more highly than that which is public. The dominance of individualism as a discourse is very evident in disputes on home education policies.

There are other considerations at issue here. It may not just be a question as to the rights of those choosing home education but also a question as to the wider social effects of those choices. Lubienski suggests:

that the individual has responsibilities regarding the education of the community and the sustenance of the common good. The elevation of individual choice epitomised by home schooling may be more than simply the reaction to institutional decline; it may be part of the problem as well. This has considerable implications for democracy and the common good.

(Lubienski 2000 p208)

Parents often choose home education because of perceived problems with state education. By choosing to exit from state education and removing their social capital, parents may well be contributing to the undermining of state education.

The pressure for home schooling does not simply come from individual parent choices but is influenced by well-organised interest groups. In the UK groups like Education Otherwise, Home Education Advisory Service, Christian Home Education and Muslim Home Education provide a wealth of information and support for parents. There are similar groups in the US i.e. the Christian Coalition, Focus on the Family and the Home School Legal Defense Association. The American groups appear more overtly anti state education than those in the UK. Some of the Christian groups, in particular, urge parents to leave the public sector and at times present an almost apocalyptic

view as to what is happening in schools. On the web site 'The Teaching Home' one reason given for home educating is that:

Parents can control destructive influences such as various temptations, false teachings (including secular humanism and occult influences of the New Age movement), negative peer pressure and unsafe environments.

(Quoted in Apple 2000 p71)

As we saw in the previous chapter, such views can encourage parents to articulate anti state education sentiments as well as to seek home education.

### **iii) Context of practice**

As we have seen, policies on home education vary considerably across the world and this is reflected in local education authorities in the UK. One reason for this is that in the UK the 1996 Education Act lacks clarity. Often, policy at a local level is determined by case law. An example of this can be seen in the duty that local authorities have to ensure that a child is receiving a 'suitable' education. At issue here is whether or not in carrying out this duty local education authorities can insist on making a home visit. Case law (Phillips v Brown, Divisional Court [20 June 1980 unreported]) established that a local authority may make an informal enquiry of parents who home educate. Currently, as home education organisations state, local authorities can fulfil their duty through accepting samples of work, a written report or by meeting away from the home.

The situation is further complicated by recent legislation. Section 175.1 of the 2002 Act states that:

'a local education authority shall make arrangements for ensuring that the functions conferred on them in their capacity as a local education

authority are exercised with a view to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children'.

(2002 Education Act)

The legislation is reinforced by the 2004 Children's Act, which places a duty of care on local authorities. Local authority officers may well argue that they cannot carry out their duty to safeguard children's welfare without the right to make a home visit.

The ambiguity of the legislation together with a lack of guidance from the DfES partly explains the considerable variation in policies across the UK. The DfES has repeatedly delayed the publication of guidance, probably because they too find this a political and legal minefield.

Written policies are important to parents as they reflect the extent of regulation by local authorities. Many home educators would argue that they took up home education to escape from local authority rules and prescription. Although the majority of families in this study welcome home visits, a small number strongly argue that whilst they are operating within the law they should be left alone. However, Deborah Simpson from the Professional Association of Teachers (PAT) argues:

We are not in any way against home education but we do have concerns... At PAT, we think there should be more monitoring of home educators so that children do not slip through the net. Inspections by the local education authority should be compulsory, and parents should have to present the child and his or her work.

(Quoted in Ashley 2005)

In reality the regulation of home education is lax. Home visits in many local authorities tend to take place once a year and last for perhaps an hour. Given the very loose definition of what constitutes a 'suitable' education prosecutions rarely occur, if at all. What appears to be at the heart of home

education policy disputes is the issue of the extent to which home education should be regulated.

Battles over regulation can be seen by home educating parents in a context where the state is no longer automatically viewed as either neutral or legitimate. Rather than being perceived as the upholder of public good, state systems such as education can be considered by them as expensive and politically questionable. A frequent criticism of state education at the current time is that it curtails parental choice. Within this context many home educators do not view educational professionals as either having expert knowledge or able to serve the public good. Research by Clarke and Newman found that:

Bureaucrats were identified as actively hostile to the public – hiding behind the impersonality of regulations and ‘red tape’ to deny choice, building bureaucratic empires at the expense of providing service, and insulated from the ‘real world’ pressures of competition by their monopolistic position. Professionals were arraigned as motivated by self-interest, exercising power over would-be customers, denying choice through the dubious claim that ‘professionals’ know best.

(Clarke and Newman 1997 p15)

This is echoed by Scott who found one family who compared their local authority to the ‘Gestapo’ when they had to fight their way through the courts to gain the right to home educate (Scott 2006 p20).

However, policy texts do not give the ultimate voice on practice. Policies are subject to question and interpretation. Where different interests are at stake there will be conflict. Stephen Ball’s notion of a continuous policy cycle means that there is constant policy recontextualisation. Currently, local authorities tend to differ in their interpretation of the legislation. Home

education policies can change over time, often in response to challenges from parents.

### **Social inequality**

One group of home educators who are not readily able to influence policies are the parents of pupils who have been forced out of state education into home education as a result of poor experiences at school. These parents tend to be isolated and in the authority concerned do not always have access to the internet. In her critique of home education, Sarah Riegel maintains:

That (home education) seems particularly unlikely to help those students who are arguably worst served by public schools, namely students who come from backgrounds marked by poverty and abuse. It is a potential source of liberation for the already privileged, but as a source of collective liberation it falls short.

(Riegel 2001 p 110, 111)

Perhaps it is useful to focus on why some families are more able than others to take a pro-active stance over the education of their choice. In this way we can, in Bourdieu's terms, construct a theory of privilege. Systems that encourage choice are open to opportunism. Parents who positively opt out of state education, with the back-up of support groups, often challenge local authority home education policies. Those parents who feel pushed out of schooling have usually experienced failure in their dealings with education authorities and may feel less able to confront either schools or the local authority. These issues can be related to inequality and social disadvantage.

However, such issues are not restricted to home schooling. In the wider education system the focus on choice and markets can be viewed as a

response to middle class anxieties. Education policy is frequently the focus of class struggles. For Stephen Ball:

The middle class family is engaged with education, as a family project, primarily in three ways, which mirror and match the arenas of inequality...policies, institutional orderings and families' actions.

(Ball 2003 p14)

This relates to Phil Brown's (1990) contention that education is entering a third wave which he terms the 'ideology of parentocracy'. This is where a child receives an education that matches the wealth and wishes of its parents rather than as a result of its own abilities and efforts. For Brown, parentocracy is part of a move towards educational privatisation which embraces notions of choice and standards. Home educators often express concerns over falling standards although, as Brown argues, there is often a lack of credible evidence to support such claims.

In some ways home education can fit into the broader context of private education. Supporters of home education view it as a clear alternative to state education. As such views gain legitimacy, home education policies are challenged as being overly bureaucratic and for not allowing parents to provide an education that reflects their personal values. Middle class parents, in particular, focus on the needs and talents of their own child. Home education can provide:

a menu from which to choose an assortment of pedagogies, with the aim of finding that which suits one's child.

(Davies 2005 p16)

What is clear is that home education policies are continually at the centre of an on-going debate. What is equally clear is that not all parents feel similarly

empowered to challenge them. If schools can be accused of replicating social inequalities, so too can the world of home education.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the policy process in relation to home education and suggests that the growth of home education may reflect a wider movement towards privatisation. It has considered how home education policies vary from country to country and it has shown that in some parts of the world it is relatively easy to home educate whilst in other parts it is illegal. It then focuses on how home education policy has changed in one local authority in the UK.

Home education provides a useful insight into how parents can influence policy. Parents have played and continue to play an active role in home education decisions. As suggested by Stephen Ball (1998), policies are continually recontextualised, by many players, at a number of levels. Certainly, home educators do not simply act as passive recipients of decisions made by others. What is particularly significant is that many parents utilise the advice of highly organised interest groups, often through the internet. These groups frequently dominate how home education is portrayed in the media and are often critical of state education. Some of these groups have a strong religious focus. The on-going debate over home education policies provides a clear example of how powerful parents can be, particularly when supported by highly organised groups. Michael Apple may well be correct when he suggests that:

Long lasting educational transformations come not from the work of educators and researchers but from larger social movements which

tend to push our major political, economic and cultural institutions in specific directions.

(Apple 2000 p63)

Currently, the demand for home education fits comfortably into an educational climate that focuses on parental choice and privatisation.

However, not all parents are equally able to challenge home education policies. As in other areas of education some parents are more privileged than others. Middle class parents are often better able to negotiate their way through legal complexity and are more aware as to how to seek help when necessary. Parents who drift into home education, frequently as a last resort after poor school experiences, are least able to challenge effectively. If 'class provides the context within which policies are developed' (Lavalette and Mooney 2000 p9) then current policy on home education may well serve to advantage middle class parents.

## **Chapter 7 – Conclusion – The divided community of home educators**

This study set out to examine the diverse nature of home education in one local authority. It has shown that home educators are far from being a homogenous group. They differ in their motives for home educating, in their pedagogical approach and in their attitudes to state education. This study identified the existence of vulnerable families who had been pushed out of state education. Very little has been written about those parents who are reluctant providers of home education.

Home education appears to be a growing phenomenon. It is thriving in an educational climate that focuses on individual choice and rights and is gaining in legitimacy. For many parents it is now viewed as one of a number of educational options. Home education is an area where skilled lobby groups, such as the HSLDA in the US, have used legislation to their own advantage. The debate around personal autonomy and notions of social participation in a democracy is not always aired in the literature on home education. As Lubienski (2003) points out, claims for individual parental rights can ignore wider public interests.

One of the aims of this study was to give a voice to parents who may have been ignored in the professional literature. This particularly applies to those parents home educating as a last resort following difficulties at school. As we have seen bullying and unmet special educational needs can impact on the entire family. Some parents struggle to provide home education and it may well be, as writers such as Apple (2000) and Riegel (2001) suggest, that the

focus should be on improving state education. For such parents, ideas linking education and social justice could appear to be meaningless. This would certainly appear to be the case for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families whose numbers are growing in the home education community following experiences of social exclusion and racial discrimination by schools (Young People Now 2006). There is a lack of coherent policy on home education in the UK with the DfES providing minimal guidance to local authorities.

The distinctive contribution of this study is primarily twofold. Firstly, it has shown that a number of families are only home educating because of the difficulties that they faced at school. Secondly, the high number of families home educating because of their religious conviction suggests that this may well be an area underestimated in UK research. In this study the largest group of parents home educating were those doing so because of their religious beliefs. It could be that the UK experience of home education is far closer to the US experience than was previously thought. Certainly, issues such as creationism were very important to a number of families.

In the media, home education is often portrayed as innovative and pioneering. However, in this study most families sought to replicate the traditional teaching that they had experienced at school. Workbooks and worksheets were commonly used and there was little evidence of the new or radical approaches to learning written about by authors such as Meighan (1997).

This piece of research has obvious limitations. It is a study of the known population of home educators in one local authority. It cannot claim to represent those parents who choose not to make themselves known. We know that parents are not legally obliged to inform anyone of their decision to

home educate if they never send their child to school. Because of this, statistics on home education are invariably incomplete. This means that there is always a degree of uncertainty in any generalisations that are made. The authority studied is located in an inner city area and findings from 'leafy suburbs' and beyond could well be very different.

Although there is a growing interest in home education the amount of academic research on the subject is small. Much of the literature reflects the views of articulate parents who home educate because of their philosophical beliefs. Such parents are often taken to represent home educators as a whole and influence how the media depicts home education. More local studies, such as this one, may help to redress the balance. It is probable that our knowledge of home education has a far less solid basis than has often been assumed. If this is the case then the legitimacy of some of the research in this area may need to be challenged.

Implicit within much that was written on home education in the past was an anti-institutional stance. Traditionally, home educating parents were wary of institutions and professional interference, feeling that they could do a better job educating their own children. It is ironic that some parents only home educate because access to formal education for their child, for whatever reason, has largely been denied to them. Social inequalities are as evident in home education as they are in education generally. The world of home education is indeed a deeply divided one.

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Young People Now (2006) Issue No 344 p.2

# APPENDIX 1

## **POLICY DOCUMENTS**

# LEA POLICY ON EXCEPTIONAL PROVISION OF EDUCATION IN SCHOOL OR OTHERWISE - 1997

## Provision for Pupils whose Parents wish to Educate at Home

### Identification of Pupils

Children whose parents wish to educate at home come to the attention of the Education Department in two main ways.

Firstly, there are direct approaches by parents to the Education Department. These are usually from parents who have recently moved into Newham or from those whose children have just reached school age. However, there are also approaches from parents who wish to remove their children from schools and educate them at home.

Secondly, and often linked with the latter forms of parental approach listed above, are approaches from schools, advising the Department that a parent wishes to remove their child.

Schools have been provided with a briefing on the proposals set out below and a reminder that they must liaise with the Education Department's Pupil Services Section in the case of any parents requesting Education Otherwise. Officers have also been told that any requests they receive should be referred to Pupil Services as soon as possible so that they can maintain the central register.

Upon receipt of a request, Pupil Services will refer the case to the Chief Education Welfare Officer who will arrange for the family to be visited by an

Education Welfare Officer (EWO) within 15 working days. This initial visit will ensure that the request is genuine and, where the child is currently in a school, not simply a protest at the way the school has been meeting the needs of the child. The involvement of the EWO will also ensure that the pupil remains on the school roll until the Education Department confirms that the parents can provide an adequate standard of education at home or can, in liaison with the school, arrange other off-site provision.

Lead officers in the Education Department have devised performance indicators to guide their response to notifications of potential Education Otherwise. These involve tight timescales to avoid a situation in which the pupil is out of school for a significant period of time without a decision on his/her future.

The initial visit by the EWO will assess the case using criteria set out in Appendix A. These criteria aim to assist the EWO to decide in broad terms whether the parent is able to educate the child at home and to assess whether there are special circumstances which should require the involvement of Social Services or other officers such as Educational Psychologist. This process provides a "filter" prior to the involvement of an Inspection and Development Officer (IDO) in monitoring the quality of education provision. In some cases, IDOs may support the initial assessments but, in the majority of cases, they will only instigate a programme of regular monitoring when it is decided that the parent is likely to be able to educate the child.

If the EWO believes the family has the potential to educate the child or children at home, the matter will be referred to the Head of the Inspection and Advisory Service. He will arrange for an initial visit from an Inspection and Development Officer. This officer will seek to confirm the EWO's judgement and provide advice on educational provision. If the IDO confirms that the child can be educated at home, Head of the Inspection and Advisory Service will inform all relevant officers and advise the school that the child may be taken off roll.

Given that the IDOs will be based at INSEC and that most other key officers will continue to be based at the Education Office, Head of the Inspection and Advisory Service has responsibility for liaising with all concerned and ensuring that pupils on the Education Otherwise Register receive regular monitoring visits. The frequency of these monitoring visits varies according to the established needs of the child. The minimum frequency is once every 6 months but, in most cases, the visits are termly.

## **Policy for Children Educated at Home – January 2005**

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 says: “The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable –

- a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and
- b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise.”

Section 437 [1] of the Education Act 1996 gives LEAs the responsibility of satisfying themselves that the education is ‘efficient and suitable’.

The Department therefore recommends that parents/carers wishing to home educate complete and return a Home Education Information Sheet. The Information Sheet asks for educational objectives, qualifications of the child’s teacher, proposed resources, the hours and organisation of learning and a copy of the proposed weekly timetable. There is no obligation on the parents to complete this Information Sheet but if they do not do so, and do not otherwise provide the relevant information, then it may be more likely that the Education Department may conclude that the child is not receiving efficient and suitable education.

On receipt of the completed Information Sheet, and/or other information which the parents provide, the Education Department will then try to decide if the arrangements appear to provide efficient and suitable education. The Education Department may seek to arrange a meeting between parents/carers and a suitably qualified and experienced teacher to assess the arrangement in the home and to produce a report. Again, there is no obligation on the parents to co-operate with this process, but failure to co-operate and provide information may make it more likely that the Education Department may conclude that it is not satisfied that the child is receiving efficient and suitable education.

Where the LEA decides that home education is suitable, it will seek to review the provision on a regular basis. The Department aims to review provision on at least an annual basis and more frequently when home education is commencing or where it is felt appropriate to do so. Again there is no legal obligation on parents to co-operate with such reviews. Where a parent employs a tutor to help educate their child, they will need to ensure that appropriate police checks have been made.

If the LEA decides that it is not satisfied that home education is suitable, then a letter will be sent to the parents/carers explaining why. The LEA may then issue a school attendance order to the parents. Failure to comply with such an order can lead to criminal prosecution. As the LEA has a duty to safeguard children's welfare, it is unlikely to decide that home education is suitable where a child is on the Child Protection Register.

When a child reaches school leaving-age, parents/carers will be alerted that no further monitoring of the child's education will take place.

**APPENDIX 2**  
**PARENT INTERVIEWS**

# *LETTER TO PARENTS*

27 May 2004

Dear

Following our telephone conversation, I am writing to confirm my visit on Tuesday, 8 June at 2.00 pm.

As I explained on the phone I am conducting research into the reasons why parents decide to home educate. As you know, I am currently studying for a doctorate at the University of London and this research will contribute towards it.

I enclose some questions which will possibly form the basis of our discussions.

Once again can I emphasise that all the parents that I interview will remain anonymous in the final study.

Thank you again for agreeing to meet with me. I hope that you are keeping well.

Yours sincerely

Barbara Burke

## PARENT INTERVIEWS

(17 Families / 24 Pupils)

	NAME	Age at Interview	M/ F	DATE OF INTERVIEW	Interviewed Husband	Wife	REASON FOR HE
1.	JJ	11 years	M	01.12.03	✓	✓	Bullying
2.	ET	14 years	M	08.04.04		✓	SEN/ Dyslexia
3.	SA	6 years	M	19.04.04		✓	Religion (Christian)
4.	MB	7 years	F	25.05.04	✓	✓	Religion (Muslim)
	AB	4 years	M	25.05.04			"
5.	BH	13 years	M	08.06.04	✓	✓	SEN/PD/ Bullying
6.	DC	8 years	M	10.06.04		✓	Religion (Christian)/ Dyslexia
	HC	5 years	F	10.06.04			"
7.	LA	14 years	M	10.06.04	✓	✓	Lifestyle
	JA	10 years	M	10.06.04			Lifestyle
8.	LH	13 years	F	14.07.04	✓	✓	Bullying
9.	FO	13 years	M	21.07.04		✓	Religion (Christian)
	SO	9 years	M	21.07.04			"
10.	LB	15 years	F	22.07.04		✓	Religion Christian)
	SB	13 years	F	22.07.04			"
11.	JR	14 years	M	27.07.04		✓	Religion (Christian)
12.	J-AR	10 years	M	17.09.04	✓	✓	Religion (Christian)
13.	JT	8 years	M	20.10.04		✓	Pedagogy
	NT	6 years	M	20.10.04			Pedagogy
14.	HI	5 years	M	05.11.04	✓	✓	Religion (Muslim)
	SI	3 years	M	05.11.04			"
15.	EK	16 years	F	10.11.04		✓	Bullying
16	BE	16 years	M	08.02.05		✓	SEN/ Aspergers
17	AMB	8 years	M	31.03.05	✓	✓	SEN/Autism

## **Interview Questions**

### **SCHOOL EXPERIENCE**

1. How did your son/daughter get on at school before you decided to educate them at home?

### **PARENTAL CHOICE**

2. Did you keep your child out of school in order to get your child into the school of your choice?

### **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

3. Does your son/daughter have any special educational needs?

### **BULLYING**

4. When you took your son/daughter out of school was bullying an issue?

### **LEARNING ABOUT HOME EDUCATION**

5. How did you learn about home education?

### **UNDERSTANDING OF HOME EDUCATION**

6. Did you understand that home education would mean that you would get no help from the LEA?

### **BACKGROUND READING ON HOME EDUCATION**

7. What have you read about home education.

### **LEA**

8. How would you describe your relationship with people who work in schools and the LEA?

### **EXPERIENCE OF HOME EDUCATION**

9. What has been your experience of educating you son/daughter at home? Have you received any help?

### **HOME OR SCHOOL**

10. Do you think that you made the right decision to home educate? Would you rather your son/daughter had a school place?

### **FEELINGS**

11. How do you feel about the way things have worked out for your family's education?

### **IDEAL EDUCATION**

12. If you could choose the perfect education for your son/daughter what would it be?

### **OWN EDUCATION**

13. Can you say something about your own education?

Barbara Burke 25<sup>th</sup> February 2004

## **APPENDIX 3 -TABLES**

**Table 1 – Background information on Home Educating Families - December 2003**

**Table 2 – Pupils removed from Home Education Register Academic Year 2003/4**

**Table 3 – Analysis of Monitoring Reports (2003/4)**

**Table 4 – Intention to enter GCSE – Pupils in Key Stage 4**

**Table 1 – Background information on Home Educating Families – December 2003**

First Name	Gender	Age	Interview	Date HE began	SEN	Last school	Reason
HA	F	7		2004		No school	Religion (Muslim)
MA	F	8		2004	SLCN	No school	Religion (Muslim)
KA	F	15		2001		Cu	Religion (Muslim)
HA	F	10		2003		Ha	Religion (Muslim)
SA	F	8		2003		No school	Religion (Muslim)
SA	F	12		2003		Ha	Religion (Muslim)
JA	M	10	*	2000		OOB	Life Style
LA	M	15	*	2000		OOB	Life Style
SA	M	7	*	2004		No	Religion (Christian)
HIB	M	6	*	2004		No school	Religion (Muslim)
SB	M	4	*	2004		No School	Religion (Muslim)
AB	M	4	*	2004		No school	Religion (Muslim)
MB	F	8	*	2001		No school	Religion (Muslim)
NB	M	11		2004		OOB	Religion (Christian)
SB	F	13	*	1997		OOB	Religion (Christian)
LB	F	16	*	1997		No School	Religion (Christian)
IB	M	9		1999		No school	Religion (Christian)
JB	M	11		1997		No school	Religion (Christian)
KB	F	13		1996		No school	Religion (Christian)
MB	M	7		2001		No school	Religion (Christian)
HC	F	13		2005		No school	Pedagoav
DC	M	9	*	2001	SpLD	No school	Religion (Christian)
HC	F	5	*	2004		No school	Religion (Christian)
AD	F	8		2004		We	Reiect State Ed
JD	F	11		2004		Fo	School choice
BE	M	16	*	2005	ASD	Ki	SEN / Bullyvina
EFK	F	10		1999		Ne	Pedagoav
AG	M	11		2004		Mo	Religion (Muslim)
KG	F	9		2004		Mo	Religion (Muslim)
UG	M	6		2004		Mo	Religion (Muslim)
AYH	F	4		2004		No school	Religion (Muslim)
AH	F	6		2004		No school	Religion (Muslim)
BYH	F	7		2001		Se	Religion (Muslim)
EH	F	6		1999		No school	Reiect school Ed
KH	F	13		1999		Ma	Reiect school Ed
BH	M	14	*	1998	PD	To	SEN / Bullyvina
LH	F	14	*	2004		Ki	Bullyvina
JJ	M	11	*	2003		Ro	Bullyvina
EK	F	16	*	2004		Ea	Bullyvina
FK	M	15		2003		Fo	Reiect school Ed
QK	F	14		2003		Sa	Reiect school Ed
AMB	M	8	*	2004	ASD	Ha	SEN / Bullyvina
AM	M	6		2004		De	Reiect school Ed
AO	M	10		2001		Av	Reiect school Ed
KO	M	13		2001		Av	Reiect school Ed
FO	M	14	*	2003		OOB	Religion (Christian)
SO	M	9	*	2003		OOB	Religion (Christian)
NP	F	11		2003		OOB	Religion (Christian)
AP	F	12		1997		No school	Pedagoav
EP	F	10		1997		No school	Pedagoav
MP	M	12		2003		Mo	Religion (Muslim)
J-AR	M	10	*	1999		No school	Religion (Christian)
RR	F	5		2005	PD	Cu	SEN
JR	M	15	*	2004		No school	Religion (Christian)
JPT	M	9	*	2003		OOB	Pedagoav
NAT	M	7	*	2003		OOB	Pedagoav
ET	M	15	*	2002	SpLD/	Ea	SEN / Bullyvina
AU	M	11		2005		Ki	School choice

**Table 2 – Pupils Removed from Home Education Register  
(Academic Year 2003-4)**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Date Contact Ceased</b>	<b>Destination</b>
1. Aa	30/09/03	School
2. Sh	03/10/03	School
3. Da	08/10/03	School
4. Ja	22/10/03	School
5. El	06/11/03	School
6. Sh	06/11/03	School
7. Su	10/11/03	School
8. Ka	13/11/03	School
9. As	13/11/03	School
10. Mo	09/12/03	School
11. Ji	12/12/03	School
12. JL	17/12/03	School
13. RP	17/12/03	School
14. Da	26/01/04	School
15. Ma	26/01/04	School
16. Br	26/01/04	School
17. Ki	29/01/04	School
18. Ta	02/02/04	School
19. Ti	03/02/04	School
20. C-L	03/02/04	School
21. Ch	03/02/04	School
22. Da	03/02/04	Moved
23. Ay	04/02/04	School
24. Da	06/02/04	School
25. Je	10/02/04	School
26. Sh	18/02/04	School
27. Jo	27/02/04	School
28. Da	03/03/04	School
29. Sh	03/03/04	School
30. Ju	03/03/04	School
31. Ma	03/03/04	School
32. Ni	05/03/04	School
33. Je	05/03/04	School
34. Na	09/03/04	Moved
35. Ma	30/03/04	Moved
36. Th	31/03/04	School
37. Th	31/03/04	Moved
38. Ro	01/04/04	School Leaving Age
39. Ja	19/05/04	Moved
40. Ad	24/05/04	School
41. Na	27/05/04	School
42. De	08/06/04	School Leaving Age
43. Ch	16/06/04	School

44.Ib	16/06/04	Moved
45.Da	21/06/04	School
46.Ha	05/07/04	Moved
47.To	05/07/04	Moved
48.Ya	05/07/04	Moved
49.Te	05/07/04	Moved
50.Ha	05/07/04	Moved
51.Ib	05/07/04	Moved
52.Ai	05/07/04	Moved
53.Za	05/07/04	School Leaving Age
54.Je	08/07/04	Moved
55.Ha	08/07/04	Moved
56.Ce	08/07/04	Moved
57.Ca	08/07/04	Moved
58.Ha	08/07/04	Moved
59.Wa	08/07/04	Moved
60.Ya	09/07/04	School

**Table 3 - Analysis of Monitoring Reports based on Visits to Families (2003-2004)**

Family	Use of a Time-table	Use of a Computer	Additional Religious Class (if mentioned)	Use of a Tutor	Example of Workbooks used	Commercial Scheme of Work
1	✓	✓	Islamic	—	Letts	—
2	✓	✓	—	✓	Scholfield	—
3	✓	—	Islamic	✓	Letts	—
4	—	✓	—	—	—	—
5	✓	✓	Christian	—	—	The School of Tomorrow
6	✓	—	—	—	Letts/ Collins	—
7	✓	✓	Islamic	—	Schofield & Sims	—
8	✓	✓	—	—	—	NAPE
9	✓	✓	—	—	Collins	—
10	✓	✓	Christian	—	Collins	—
11	✓	—	Christian	—	Letts	—
12	✓	✓	—	—	—	—
13	✓	✓	—	—	—	—
14	✓	✓	Christian (Baptist)	—	Letts	—
15	✓	✓	Christian (7 <sup>th</sup> Day Adventists)	✓	Longman	Knowledge 306 Tutor Group
16	—	—	—	—	CPG	—
17	—	—	—	—	—	—
18	—	—	—	—	Letts	—
19	✓	✓	—	—	—	—
20	✓	—	—	✓	Oxford	—
21	✓	✓	Islamic	—	Letts	—
22	✓	✓	Islamic	—	Collins	—
23	✓	✓	Christian	—	Collins	The School of Tomorrow
24	✓	✓	—	—	Letts	—
25	✓	✓	—	—	W H Smith	—
26	✓	✓	—	—	CGP	—
27	✓	✓	Christian (Jehovah Witness)	—	—	NAPE
28	✓	✓	—	—	CGP	—
29	✓	✓	—	—	W H Smith	—
						Continued

30	✓	✓	Christian	—	—	The School of Tomorrow
31	✓	—	—	—	Letts	—
32	✓	—	—	✓	—	PEACH
33	✓	✓	Islamic	—	CGP	—
34	✓	✓	—	—	—	—
35	✓	✓	—	—	Letts	—
36	✓	✓	—	—	W H Smith	—
37	✓	✓	Islamic	—	Heinemann	—
38	✓	✓	—	—	Schofield & Sims	—
Total	34	29	15	5	27	—

**Table 4 – Intention to enter GCSE – Pupils in Key Stage 4**

<u>Pupils in Key Stage 4 (aged 14 years +)</u>		
<u>Pupil</u>	<u>Reasons for home educating</u>	<u>Intention to enter GCSE</u>
KA	Religion (Muslim)	Yes
LA	Life style	No
LB	Religion (Christian)	Yes
BE	SEN / Bullying	No
BH	SEN / Bullying	No
LH	Bullying	No
EK	Bullying	Yes
FK, QK	Rejection state education	Yes
FO	Religion (Christian)	Yes
JR	Religion (Christian)	Yes
ET	SEN / Bullying	No