

Discourses of Home Education and the Construction of the Educational 'Other'

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Abstract

This paper considers the discursive construction of the educational 'other' through home education in England and Wales. Taking the view that language is a political tool (Fairclough, 2003), this paper explores how the space of 'other' education is discursively created from both within and outside home education. Using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) methodology, a variety of texts (including official documents, Local Authority websites, the media and home educators' own words) are analysed. Discursive strategies of universalism, normalisation, self-proclamation and self-censorship are identified and considered. It is argued that these strategies are instrumental in creating and maintaining the separation and difference which is used to politically position home education and home educators. The paper concludes with the argument that genuine educational plurality is partly a matter of discursive practice and that changing patterns of discourse around home education may be a way of increasing diversity, inclusion and opportunity within education.

Keywords

home education, alternative education, educational plurality, discourse analysis

Introduction


The public debate on home education often appears fuelled by extreme positions with arguments for and against home education frequently becoming entrenched in polemical positions and obscuring rhetoric (Pattison, 2016). Although no official figures are kept, the indications are that home education has been expanding in the UK over recent decades (Nicholson, 2017a). This growth could be seen as the establishment of an educational option and welcomed as such (Morton, 2010). However unlike other educational innovations, such as Forest Schools (Knight, 2013),

home education has not been widely embraced (Rothermel, 2015). Instead, it provokes controversy with regular calls for increased control and regulation (Badman, 2009; Monk, 2009; Soley, 2017), serious allegations of religious extremism and radicalisation (Basu quoted by Simpson, 2017) and abuse and neglect (Roberts, quoted by Hill, 2015). Official and popular suspicion on the one part is met on the other by a community which Graham Badman, the author of a major Labour government review of home education in England and Wales, described as “a heady mixture of pent up rage, frustration, resentment and a rejection of third party judgement” (Badman, 2009: 11). This last descriptor is reiterated by qualitative work with home educators including Thomas (1998) and Morton (2010). Parents frequently voice the feeling that their rejection of schooling leaves them feeling criticised, vulnerable and even at risk of exploitation. The situation revealed is one of a mixture of suspicion, anger and fear further fuelled by frequently tense relationships between home educators and local authorities and by provocative media reporting (Rothermel, 2015).

Research on home education has been increasing in tandem with its growing practice (Galloway, 2003). Particular strands within this research include political and ethical issues and the matter of how national policies are shaped (Monk 2010, 2015; Lubienski and Brewer, 2015; Rothermel 2015). These questions have also fuelled public and political debate including concern about the UK’s lack of regulation and associated fears that home education represents a dangerous concession that leaves children vulnerable to a range of abuses (Badman, 2009; Soley 2017). Home educator’s refutations take the form of both research (for example Fortune-Wood, 2006, 2012) and personal testimonies (for example Mountney 2012; Dowty, 2000). As well as this, home educators share experiences and thoughts widely through social media and membership groups.



Whilst the causes contributing to this ‘us and them’ stance may be multiple, there is as yet little which draws attention to discourse and the part this plays in the debate. Exceptions include considerations of how mainstream educational discourse may limit understandings of home education (Thomas and Pattison, 2013) and an examination of metaphor in describing home educated children’s learning (Pattison, 2016). Unlike these two examples, this paper focuses particularly on the role of discourse, from sources such as official documents, Local Authority websites, the mass media,


academics and home educators themselves, in setting up home education as a site of controversy in the first place.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) as proposed by Fairclough (2001a) positions language as a social process and a conduit of power. Applying CDA to the discourses of home education allows social relations, including power relations, and inequalities around home education, to be examined and a consideration made of how patterns of discourse may contribute to its positioning as an ‘othered’ educational space  space set aside from mainstream concepts of education.

Methodology

Discourse analysis examines language as a means through which information about the world and about our positions in the world may be explored (Vaughan, 2017). In this study the dialectical-relational version of critical discourse analysis (CDA) as presented by Fairclough (2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2012) is used to explore the relations between discourses surrounding home education and its position in both the educational landscape of contemporary UK society and the wider social and cultural scene.

The political position of home education in the UK can be construed as representing a ‘social wrong’ of the kind Fairclough (2012) sees as suitable subject matter for CDA. Home education may be viewed as a form of “inequality” and/or “lack of freedom” (Fairclough, 2012; 13) in the following ways. Home education, whilst being a legal form of education, is not formally presented to parents whose children’s are approaching the age of compulsory education as a ‘school’  (Lees, 2014), misinformation and unsubstantiated information detrimental to home education is frequently given by authoritative sources as accurate (Charles-Warner, 2015) and home education is frequently treated by both popular and official sources as a deviance rather than a reasoned and legitimate choice (Pattison, 2015). As Fairclough states, there is inevitably a degree of subjectivity to any assessment of a social wrong and as such, CDA is an unavoidably political act in which the researcher is inescapably implicated. There is certainly much that might be debated about this designation which lies outside the scope of this paper (see Rothemel, 2015; Monk, 2015; Badman, 2009; Lubienski and Brewer, 2015), but for the purposes of this analysis, this  is sufficient to

accord with Fairclough's criteria of suitable subject matter  to consider there is a legitimate opportunity to examine and challenge the political social dialectic on home education.

CDA positions social practices as mediating forces between social structures and social events (Fairclough, 2012). In terms of home education, social structures can be seen as referring to general and abstract constructions through which home education is commonly understood, for example; ideas about education, pedagogy and schooling, the social constructions of parents, parenting, children and childhood. Social events refer to particular concrete practices of home education, for example parliamentary debate, practices of contact between Local Authorities and families, home education groups and gatherings, political activities and particular texts on and about home education. The social practices which link these ideas, events and objects constitute an order of discourse which is itself a dialectical shaper of representation and identity (Fairclough, 2012). The analysis here concerns both of these issues (representations and identity) and as part of them, the semiotic strategies which social agents use to pursue their goals.

Following identification of a social wrong, Fairclough's analytical framework for CDA proposes that distinction be made between the dominating and resisting or non-dominating discourses which pertain to it (Fairclough, 2001c). In line with this, two categories of discourse have been identified: 'outside' and 'inside'. The first of these refers to texts which originate from sources 'outside' home education such as the law and mass media and in which home education represents a concern rather than an affiliation. The second category consists of texts emanating from 'inside' home education which align themselves educationally or politically with home education as a cause. These are texts written by home educators and by home education supporters.

Fairclough's CDA analytical framework (2001c) then suggests the examination of features of discourse, particularly looking for the social functions which language serves. Four such features have been identified in the form of the semiotic strategies discussed above. These are, from the 'outside' texts, strategies of universalism and normalisation and from the 'inside' texts, strategies of self-proclamation and self-censorship.

These strategies and their implications will be discussed through selected texts chosen as exemplars. The texts used are readily available sources within the public domain and constitute part of the public discourse concerned with home education. However, no claim is made for their representativeness of the mass of literature and sources on home education. Selecting texts in this way has opened up CDA to charges of bias in that texts for analysis may be chosen precisely to support the author's ideological commitment (Widdowson, 2004). In response, CDA positions itself within an interpretative paradigm which understands all authors and researchers to be socially positioned and therefore denies that objective analysis is ever possible (Bhatia et. al, 2008). This paper recognises the political positioning of the subject matter and approach and I offer the consideration undertaken here as an exploration, through CDA, of the construction of a politicised and dynamic situation of which interpretation is a pervasive, critical and on-going part.

Analysis and Discussion

This section deal with findings from selected documentation about home education which is covered in four categories. These are: 'Outside' - Discourses of universalism, 'Outside' - Discourses of Normalisation, 'Inside' - Discourses of Self-proclamation, and 'Inside' - Discourses of Self- censorship.

'Outside' - Discourses of universalism

Universalism refers to discourse practices which treat social practices as being without potential or actual differences. The result is, as Shi-xu (2005) argues, that cross-cultural differences are denied through the imposition of universal representations. Such universalising discourse can imply homogeneity across education, meaning that the reality that large numbers of children in the UK do not attend school goes unmentioned and unrecognised.

My first example of this comes from Section 7 of the 1996 Education Act; the current Education Act for England and Wales which deals with school starting age.

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.

(Education Act, 1996: s.7)

Section 7 lays out the educational responsibilities of parents of children of 'compulsory school age'. Through the lens of dialectical relational analysis the phrase 'compulsory school age' draws on readers' knowledge of the widespread social practice of schooling, the cultural values accorded to education and the power relations in which adults make decisions about the lives of children. Given this context, a reasonable interpretation of this phrase is that, for some period of life, school is mandatory. However, school attendance is only compulsory (i.e. legally enforceable) for children who are registered with a school. If a child is not registered with a school, then school is not compulsory. Beyond the potential confusion of its phraseology, Section 7 is also important for its final two words: 'or otherwise'. These two words constitute the only legal provision made for education outside schools in English and Welsh law. 'Home' education is not mentioned as such anywhere in legislation nor is the expression 'otherwise' used again. These two words are therefore tremendously important as it is their presence which legally entitles home education. Furthermore, they also acknowledge that education and school are not necessarily synonymous, thereby opening up the space for educational plurality.

The phrase 'compulsory school age' continues to appear regularly in the law without the caveat 'or otherwise' which section 7 supplies. Section 8 of the 1996 Education Act serves to illustrate:

Subsections (2) and (3) apply to determine for the purposes of any enactment whether a person is of compulsory school age.

(2) A person begins to be of compulsory school age—

(a) when he attains the age of five, if he attains that age on a prescribed day, and

(b) otherwise at the beginning of the prescribed day next following his attaining that age.

(3) A person ceases to be of compulsory school age at the end of the day which is the school leaving date for any calendar year

(Education Act, 1996: s.8)

The frequent repetition of the term negates the message of 'or otherwise' from the previous section and works to universalise schooling through the logical association of 'compulsory school age' with that of compulsory school attendance.

This universalism is further compounded by the direction that compulsory school age begins on a certain day (either the day of the child's fifth birthday or the next prescribed day following that birthday). This direction makes sense when education is to be enacted through school attendance because school education clearly begins on the first day of school attendance. However, the idea that other forms of education will begin on a certain day imposes a view of education restricted to, and therefore universalised through, school attendance. For many home educators this is a denial of their educational philosophies as well as practices (Thomas, 1998; Thomas and Pattison, 2007). These educators assert that rather than post 5 education being a beginning, it is simply a continuation of their children's lives: "When [he] reached school age we just continued; nothing changed" (Thomas, 1998: 32). Such understandings of education are not encompassed within Section 8's delineation of compulsory school age. The result is that some forms of education (those that equate living and learning rather than education and schooling) are effectively denied, whilst school practices are treated as universally relevant.

Whether or not the confusion between compulsory school age and compulsory school can be attributed to this legal source, the phrase 'compulsory schooling' is a ubiquitous one. Its usage and message is widespread in educational, policy, academic, media and popular sources (such as magazine articles) and serves to universalise the norm of school attendance.

'Outside' - Discourses of Normalisation

Whilst universalism acts to deny difference, normalisation highlights difference as deviation. Normalisation posits what Fairclough calls a "common sense in the service of power" (Fairclough, 2001a: 64) in which a particular ideology becomes embedded in discourse as being the correct or normal version of events whilst marginalising other

possibilities. In a relational dialectical sense a particular view of the world is being validated as correct. The normalising discourse of 'going to school' becomes part of the social order of both education and childhood just as the actual practice of attending school is part of the social order (Pattison, 2015). Against this, home education stands as a deviation.

The following extract is taken from the website of Child Law Advice, which is run by Coram Children's Legal Centre, part of the Coram Group of Charities. The Legal Centre is particularly concerned with protecting and promoting children's rights and Child Law Advice offers "specialist advice and information on child, family and education law" (Child Law Advice, n.d.).

Am I allowed to home educate my child?

It is possible to teach your child at home on a full or part-time basis at any time as long as the child is not subject to a School Attendance Order.

(Child Law Advice, n.d: no pagination)

The information is set out in the common format of a question and answer exchange. This presentation clearly confers authority on the knowledge provider who has already confirmed that expertise by self-identifying as specialist in the area. In this example the questioner appears not just to be seeking knowledge but also through the phrase, "am I allowed?" seems to be requesting permission. This would not have been the case if the question had been passively worded – for example, 'is it legal to home educate?'

The result is that the exchange is more than the provision of information. It is also an example of what Fairclough (2001a) calls the 'power behind discourse' illustrating a situation of supplication and control. The information provided is controlled by the legal centre running the website; however, it is not just knowledge which is being given but a particular perspective on home education. The wording of the question implies that approval is needed to home educate (it is not – Nicholson, 2017c) and that therefore, control over home education lies not with parents but with an external agency who may or may not grant permission.

The full answer to the question ‘Do I need approval to educate my child at home’ is that approval is not needed, nonetheless home education is conferred as a possibility rather than an option on par with school attendance. The effect is heightened by the use of the passive in response to the active question. Instead of an affirmative; ‘Yes you are!’ the answer is depersonalised to an inactive possibility where, again, control of the situation is removed from the questioner.

In the response, the word ‘teach’ is used rather than the term ‘educate’ as in the question. Using ‘teach’ confers a particular understanding of what it means to educate. As teaching is a pivotal aspect of school, the implication is that home education mirrors, or should mirror, school education in its requirement for (professional) teaching. Many home educators distance themselves from pedagogy based on teaching (Thomas, 1998; Thomas and Pattison, 2007; Pattison, 2016) however, it is quite likely this is not known to the website authors and that the use of the word ‘teach’ is an unconscious normalisation of school pedagogy (Fairclough, 2001b). For home educators however, the assumption of teaching is a further underlining of their distance from ‘normal’. The language reminds the questioner (a parent) of the enormity and seriousness of what they are considering (taking over the role of a professional). The immediate caveat of the School Attendance Order suggests that a child may well be subject to one. In fact, School Attendance Orders are rarely issued and then only at the end of a legal process (Nicholson, 2017b).

Whilst the answer provides accurate information, it also imparts the message that home education is not normal, being merely ‘a possibility’ with caveat. The idea of permission is raised and although clarified, the suggestion is that home education is a concession rather than a right. Together, these things normalise school attendance (which does not have caveats attached, for which the idea of permission does not pertain and which serves as the model of education). The normality of school attendance is upheld whilst the message that home education is counter normal is extended.

The next extract is taken from the online edition of the Guardian, a UK daily national broadsheet newspaper which takes a centre–left political position and has the stated ambition of being “world's leading liberal voice” (Guardian News and Media Sustainability Report, 2010; no pagination). This extract is from an article entitled, “DIY

schooling on the rise as more parents opt for home education”. It takes up the theme that, in the UK, the exact number of home-educated children is unknown.

Nobody knows exactly how many children are being educated at home because many parents are under no obligation to tell the authorities.

(Mansell and Edwards, 2016: no pagination)

The sentence begins with ‘nobody knows’ as its driving issue. This is immediately followed by an explanation of why nobody knows – because parents are not obliged to tell. The implication is that numbers of home educated children could be ‘exactly’ known. In reality, this would always be difficult because the home educating population is a fluctuating one with children coming in and out of school during the course of the school year; often in the middle of terms. Nevertheless, parents are positioned within the sentence structure as the active agents who could inform the authorities about home education numbers but who do not. Thus constructed, the lack of knowledge is an issue to do with parents.

Whilst not explicitly stated, this absence of knowledge is presented as a problem. This is partly achieved through the offering of a solution as a counter part to the ‘problem’; parents could be obliged to tell the authorities and this would solve the knowledge deficit. This is not explicitly offered in the sentence but it is inferred so that a postulated “ideal reader” (Fairclough, 2001a: 45) could pick up on the implications, recognise the ‘problem’ of the lack of knowledge and see the ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ as being obliging parents to inform the authorities. The discourse employed here acts to problematise home educating parents, the levels of knowledge on home education and, by implication, home education in general. The total effect is to situate home education outside the bounds of normal as a problematic, ‘other’ practice.

My third example is taken from the website of Bath and North East Somerset Council. Local councils have been recommended by the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (now Department for Education) to provide clear and accurate information to parents about home education including information about legality, roles and responsibilities in home education (DCSF, 2007). Bath and North East Somerset Council website was selected at random and this extract taken from their page offering advice to parents considering home education.

For some parents the choice of registering with a school or electively home educating is an easy one to make. For others the decision is not so easy; parents need to seriously consider whether elective home education is right for them and their child. Two important questions that parents may wish to ask themselves is am I committed to providing my child with full time education for as long as it takes and will my decision foreclose my child's options in later years?

(Lerway, n.d.; no pagination)

The first sentence sets up the choice between school and home education. It makes the point that for some, this choice will be easy although it does not say for which group of parents this will be the case or why. This is dealt with in the second sentence where the choice between school and home education is addressed solely through the consideration of home education; parents are not urged to consider whether school is right for them and their child. Parents considering home education are then offered two further questions for reflection: are they prepared to commit to the long term implications of home education and might they be foreclosing their child's future choices. These two questions are not presented to parents considering school education here (or indeed very often anywhere) although there is no reason to think that they might not be as pertinent. By suggesting that only home educators need to consider these matters, the passage is conforming with the norm of school attendance and presenting home education as counter normal.

The wording of the questions on which potential home educators are asked to reflect is also noteworthy. The first question contains the words 'for as long as it takes'. The time line of education is rarely 'for as long as it takes' and school education (in company with almost all formal education) has a firmly finite span. It is also unclear as to what the 'it' refers. What is being alluded to might be some tangible goal of education such as appropriate exam passes or perhaps simply completing the span of compulsory education or possibly some less prosaic goal that might signify the end of parental responsibility. Whilst the exact meaning is unclear, the overall message is that home education is a long term responsibility which goes beyond the normal commitment of being a parent and which cannot be rescinded; although in reality neither of these are necessarily the case.

The second question on the foreclosing of future options is again very rarely asked about school attendance, although it might be asked about making subject choices within a schooling framework. Whether school attendance in itself is a foreclosing of future options is, both educationally and philosophically, a highly debatable question; the message here however, is that the foreclosing of options is an issue relevant only to home education. This passage is set within the wider framework of 21st century western 'parenting' culture as recognised by Lee *et. al.* (2014). Within this understanding, parents are seen as the bearers of responsibility for their children in both the present and the future. According to them, "this way of constructing the *present*, in which events or experiences are connected to the possibility of danger, leads to a distinctive view of the future, one which is influenced by fear of future harm" (Lee *et. al.* 2014: 16, italics in original). The decision to home educate in the present must be weighed through its future risk potential. As presented here, the option to attend school does not provoke these questions and therefore, by implication, does not embody risk. School attendance therefore emerges as the logical course of action for the normative parent who, as part of that normativity, takes a long-term responsibility characterised by risk aversion.

In these three examples of normalisation, home education is presented as a deviation from 'the normal' and, by implication, to what is morally 'right' – a theme highlighted by Beck (2015) in his cultural anthropological exploration of attitudes towards home education in Norway. Beck's theorising and analysis depict groups which appear to be in educational, but also in moral opposition. The result is that rather than home education representing a plurality of choice or a welcome indication of diversity, it appears as a moral divergence.

I now turn to two discursive strategies through which those active in, or championing home education lay claim to an 'other' territory for themselves. The first of these is through techniques of self-proclamation and the second through acts of self-censorship.

'Inside' - Discourses of Self-proclamation

The UK Unschooling Network Blog is one of many blogs and websites which can be found through internet searches of terms like 'unschooling UK' or 'radical unschooling UK'. 'Unschooling' refers to a practice of home education which is entirely child led,

without an adult imposed curriculum, timetable or explicit educational goals. It is a style of home education which critics often find particularly worrying (Badman, 2009). The website offers an authentic (although not necessarily representational), unschooling voice. This paragraph forms part of the site's 'Introduction to Unschooling' which lists ten principles of unschooling; the one explored here being the tenth and last of these.

10. Advocacy on Behalf of Children

We acknowledge that many of the societies that we live in have a very different view of parent-child relationships from the principles expressed above. We seek to promote and normalize within our societies, the idea that children are full, complete and equal human beings, deserving of the same level of respect and as many as possible of the same freedoms that are afforded to adults. Indeed, we see the concept of Adultism as being as important as Feminism.

(UK Unschooling Network Guidelines, 2020 (sic): no pagination)

The article addresses an audience to whom the stance of the unschoolers is being explained, rather than their agreement assumed. The unschoolers present their view that children are "full, complete and equal human beings" who, in terms of respect and freedom, should be viewed and treated in much the same way that are adults. (The 'full, complete and equal' question in terms of alternative education has been explored philosophically by Stern, 2017 and 'respect' as a frequent unschooling family trait, is noted empirically by Gray, 2016).

There is no named author attached to the guidelines, although there is a named poster of the extract. Instead, a suggestion of collective authorship is made through the use of the pronoun, 'we' and through references to the group behind the website. Together, these outline the unschoolers as a distinct collective and suggest a group solidarity which could form the basis of a potential political grouping (Jenkins, 2004). The comparison with Feminism as an important social, philosophical and political movement further accentuates this implication.

Whilst emphasising their differences, this passage leaves the contrast between unschoolers and other societies creatively open. There is no explicit comparison made as to how these other societies view children. The unschoolers allude by implication

only to the opposition between their views and that of the 'others'. Based on this difference however, the unschoolers self-present as a distinctive group created through this contrast. Although the stated goal is to normalise their position, the thrust of the passage is to underline the grounds of difference and the need for others (rather than the unschoolers) to adapt their perspectives. The normalisation they seek is to be pursued through changes to the rest of society rather than through an exploration of common ground instigated by themselves.

The passage marshals certain ideas, 'fullness', 'completeness', 'equality', 'respect' and 'freedom', as characterising the views of unschoolers. This draws on particular cultural categorisation devices (Sacks, 2006). The sense making work demanded here relies on readers identifying these ideas as positive and thereby evaluating the position of the unschoolers positively through their association with them. Paradoxically perhaps, this stands as testimony to the similarities rather than the differences between the unschoolers and the mainstream audience they are addressing. Whilst the unschoolers may stand outside the norm, they do not appear to be outside the consensual value system (Hall, 1982) and are able to appeal to this in the promotion of their cause as well as using it to underline their separateness.

My next example is an extract from the editorial of an academic journal, *Other Education*. In this editorial, Helen Lees puts the case for diversity in education and the upholding of educational alternatives.

A key concern of alternative education is of course to maximise attention to uniqueness. What we are encountering socially around the world is a minimisation of uniqueness as a principle linked to financial control (and the social goods finance provides). Obviously this is nonsensical because diversity breeds growth whereas similarity breeds stagnation. Ask Mr Darwin.

(Lees, 2016: 1)

The 'other' of alternative education is marked out here through expressions of difference backed by authority claims to knowledge about alternative education. The mark of authority can be seen in the use of modalities around what alternative education 'is' and how we 'are' experiencing it rather than more tentative formulations

(Fairclough, 2003). This is a different technique to that employed in the previous extract, where the discourse worked to create a collective identity based on the commonly held views of its members. As in the previous passage, alternative education here is 'othered' through direct comparison with the rest of the world. This occurs through the 'key concern' of the alternative with 'uniqueness' which contrasts with the 'minimisation of uniqueness' elsewhere. Certain ideas here link to either the mainstream or the alternative so that they may then be collectively evaluated. Alternative education and uniqueness are linked to financial emancipation, diversity and growth whilst mainstream education is linked to uniformity, financial control, similarity and stagnation. Precisely what forges these links is not explained in this brief extract however, unlike the previous passage, the reader is explicitly pointed towards the evaluation of these categories. The minimisation of uniqueness and financial control are labelled as "nonsensical" by virtue of their causal association with similarity and stagnation so that the label 'nonsense' applies categorically to these four ideas as a group. Whilst not explicitly voiced, sense (as opposed to nonsense) becomes the categorical marker of the ideas associated with the alternative: financial emancipation, diversity and growth. Alternative education is deliberately 'othered' not only through the assertion of its internal and unique characteristics, but also through the exclusive claims to reason made on its behalf.

This assessment of alternative education vs mainstream education is further backed by the use of information management markers which emphasise or add validity to the contribution of the discourse. As in the previous passage, a collective pronoun, 'we', is used. This time its use is inclusive encompassing author and readers in what is deemed a common global experience. The 'we' here rules out or denies other experiences or interpretations of experience (an act of linguistic universalism) and thus works to carry the author's point of view as a representation of reality. The author's contention is further managed through the use of the words 'of course', 'obviously' and the three-word sentence 'Ask Mr Darwin'. These markers do not contribute to the information of the passage (Schiffrin, 2006). Instead they direct the reader towards the author's viewpoint as a kind of "ideological common sense" (Fairclough, 2001a: 76) by pointing out the expected reader response to her argument. Their use denies the possibility that the author's stance can be logically interrogated. However, needing to point out the 'obvious' at all mitigates against the 'naturalised' status of the author's

argument. An ideology is 'naturalised' when it is incorporated into common sense to the extent that its ideological character is lost (Fairclough 2001a). Here, however, the use of such naturalising language suggests the author herself is attempting to empty out the ideological content of her contentions and to advance her argument as an inevitable result of logic and rationality.

Category 'Inside' - Discourses of Self- censorship

Bourdieu describes self-censorship as "the concessions one makes to a social world by accepting to make oneself acceptable in it" (Bourdieu, 2006: 483). Finding examples of self-censorship entails looking for restraints on speech and behaviour which have been made to 'fit in'. That home educators may find themselves in contentious positions is a theme of qualitative research, "You are always on the defensive. People challenge what we do but we don't challenge them." (Home educating parent in Thomas, 1998: 121). Such an environment can lead to self-censorship if one form of defence adopted is to avoid the potential challenge. An illustration of this is shown in the following example.

"I was more or less the first one in [this town] to do home ed. I told her not to say she was a home schooler, because it always led to a long discussion – some people would be angry." (Home educating parent in Thomas, 1998; 121)

The silencing of the home educated child and her parent is a demonstration of "powerful participants *controlling and constraining the contributions of non-powerful participants*" (Fairclough, 2001a: 38–9, italics in original). The unequal power relations, demonstrable through the potential of the questioner to be angry, leads to the self-censorship of the home educating parent and child who are planning to deliberately avoid discussing their educational choice. It is quite possible that the potential interlocutor will not be aware of this power but is simply asking a normatively acceptable question about school to a school aged child and her parent. As such this snippet has much in common with the cross cultural potential for miscommunication described by Fairclough (2001a). The failure of the home educated child to be forthcoming with information is then more likely to be attributed to her personal failure (shyness, inarticulacy, social ineptitude) than to be recognised as a product of the power of the questioner.

A fuller example of self-censorship is given in the following extract from a personal memoir by Ross Mountney, an erstwhile home educating parent.

We were also back to the question ‘not in school today?’ every time we went out. Sometimes I give an explanation, sometimes when I don’t feel so brave I just say ‘no’ and hope the bluntness will prevent further inquiry.

(Mountney, 2012: 69)

Later, Mountney describes a home visit by the Local Authority (LA) home education officer:

My educational ammunition was primed and I was determined to give a very ‘normal’ impression of our home educating days rather than the usual ones with Charley hanging upside down in a tree or covered in mud and Chelsea buried under a mountain of textiles and craft materials. People just got the wrong impression, jumped to the wrong conclusions.

(Mountney, 2012: 127).

In both examples, Mountney imagines the outsider’s view of her life and the poor impression that will be gained from the mainstream perspective on education. She draws on her understanding of ‘normal’ against which her own life stands in contrast, positioning herself outside the bounds of normal as ‘other’. This reflected appraisal leads to her solution to self-censor both her words and actions. In the first example her reaction is to attempt to ‘pass’, by tacit association, as part of the dominant group (Kaufman and Johnson, 2004) and in the second by attempting to appear to meet mainstream expectations. The first is an example of power in discourse, where control over what is said is exerted by the social situation – the social practices and structures that normalise school attendance (Fairclough, 2001a). The second is an example of the power behind discourse (Fairclough, 2001a)– the construction of the ‘normal’ life and education which Mountney wants to emulate in her children’s behaviour and, no doubt, in the language she uses to speak to the LA official due to visit.

Looking back on events and recounting to a trusted audience, Mountney is able to use these acts of self-censorship to build an affiliation with her imagined readers - fellow home educators. This sharing, built on presumed mutual understanding, sets up a

solidarity between Mountney and her readership who she clearly sees as being like her; participating in and understanding her world to the extent that they will also understand her problems with 'outsiders'. Mountney is 'othering' both her own experiences and those of her readers by setting them apart as examples of joint understanding which stand outside the 'normal' and, as such, confer a collective and unique identity on those who share them.

In Mountney's writing the 'outsiders' are further delineated as the mass of 'people' who will not be able to understand the home educators' experiences and will therefore form the 'wrong impression' or jump to 'wrong conclusions'. As Guibernau (2013) describes the construction of political minority groups so here can be seen the delineation of the collective around common experiences and shared understandings; a position which is consolidated and strengthened by the tension with the outgroup. Although the memoir is the contribution of an individual, it both draws on and further establishes collective beliefs, values and emotions of UK home educators thereby contributing to the construction of shared identity through shared cognitive structures (Koller, 2012).

Home Education: discourse and identity

This paper began with a question about the relationship between the educational mainstream and its 'other' and about the construction and maintenance of this separation in discourses of home education in the UK. I have sought to shed light on this question by identifying and examining four strategies of discourse; universalism, normalisation, self-proclamation and self-censorship surrounding home education. I have argued that these techniques result in exclusion, rejection, contrast and opposition in ways which contribute to the construction of home education as a differentiated and 'othered' form of education in the UK and that this mainstream/alternative divide (as defined by Kraftl, 2014) is under construction from both sides.

From outside the group, the othering of home education is achieved through universalistic discourses of school attendance and, where it is addressed, the treatment of home education as counter-normal. Both these strategies have the result of presenting school education as normative; positioning the dominant educational culture as a kind of social truth which not only accurately reflects reality but also

represents common sense (Fairclough, 2001a, Hall, 1982). This is an excluding discourse which allows home education only as an othered, 'out' group. However, whilst mainstream discourse imposes exclusion, this position is also cultivated by home educators' active rejection of the mainstream.

For home educators, the position of imposed/self-sought exclusion is a gathering point for collective identity where the position of 'other' offers a place of belonging conferred by shared experiences and values and consolidated through a discourse of collectivity. As Guibernau (2013) asserts, such a position may act to establish the political status of the 'othered' group by strengthening and reinforcing their sense of purpose and conviction. Discourse here offers a tool in "the reflexive construction and reconstruction of the self" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 260). Such usage can be discerned through discourses of self-proclamation, such as those of the unschoolers, who use the position of 'other' as the basis for making visible and promoting group identity in their public facing discourse. The unschoolers' comparison of their cause with feminism can be seen as their own construction of an identity based political position (Kaufman and Johnson, 2004). Acts of self-censorship, which can later be shared, act to consolidate this unity through unique collective experience. From both sides of the divide, discourse can be seen as a shared social resource which is used to construct identity at the individual and group level and that differentiation and exclusion are important to this process (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004).

Ways forward ...

The fourth stage of Fairclough's methodology of CDA (2001c) presents the challenge of finding possibilities for change within the current situation. Once such possibility lies perhaps in the naturalistic view, taken by both parties, about the differences between them. Educational and political thought and value disparity are seen as actual and real barriers of difference which will continue, inevitably, to pertain. However, as Fairclough (2003) argues the dialectic of identity means that whilst people might be pre-positioned in a situation they can also react to it so that the nature of identity is constructed rather than given (Hall, 2000). Through such an understanding, identity is a site of contestability and flexibility, meaning that the relationship between the alternative and mainstream (including these labels themselves) are not inevitable but are open to re-evaluation and renegotiation. Home education identity can be

viewed as flexible and capable of reconstruction; a dynamic practically reinforced by the transient nature of the home educating population as well as the politically and socially changing nature of the environment in which home education is enacted. New opportunities and dynamics for identity construction make new possibilities for re-invention continually available. These opportunities show discourse as a political practice; able to uphold but also alter power relations (Fairclough 1992).

If the trajectory here is to be towards greater educational plurality through the acceptance of home education as a viable, legitimate and reasonable educational choice existing as part of a wider landscape of educational diversity, then discourse patterns and identity construction, from both sides of the postulated divide, will need to change. For the outsiders, this will entail recognising the existence and legitimacy of home education through a re-negotiation of the construction of educational normality. For home educators, the challenge is to develop forms of identity that no longer rely on a contrastive and 'othering' opposition to the mainstream. This need by no means entails an acceptance of that which they have sought to question nor does it imply an integration of practice or thought with the mainstream. Instead, it means creating and cultivating a basis for educational plurality which is capable of supporting rather than suppressing educational difference and diversity. The grounds for this could be, as suggested by Kunzman, a consideration of how to work towards goals of common good and individual realisation "even while travelling a distinctly different road than institutional schooling" (Kunzman, 2016: 189). This will no doubt be a major challenge for those whose identity, personal and collective, has been built around their experiences of 'othering'. It will also entail rethinking the academic arguments surrounding home education which likewise frequently over rely on comparison and the maintenance of difference. However, renegotiating the ground could also ultimately form a liberating step towards educational diversity, inclusion and a genuine extension of educational understanding, opportunity and choice.

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