New technologies, Knowledge, Networks and Communities in Home-education

Amber J. Fensham-Smith

School of Social Sciences

Cardiff University

Thesis presented in partial fulfilment for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy

February, 2017

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD

STATEMENT 2

This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references.

STATEMENT 3

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signed: Date: 20/02/2017

Acknowledgements

Abstract

A promising, yet relatively small, body of academic scholarship on UK home-education has emerged in recent years. However, it persists as an area of research marked by partisanship. The digital age is often heralded as an era of liberation; empowering disparate groups to network, exchange practice, and learn from one another. However, few have considered what this might mean for home-education. This study sought to answer the overdue call for research in this area.

This thesis is a mixed methods study; based on an online survey of 242 home-educators and 52 individual and group interviews with 85 parents, children and young people who used a range of new technologies. These families resided in different localities across England, Wales and Scotland. The analyses explored the role of new technologies, knowledge and learning within the themes of community, pedagogy and identity.

The findings indicated that home-educating families participate in a diverse landscape of online networks and offline communities. New technologies have been effective in mobilising support at times of 'threat'. It was also found that participation in this landscape has given new home-educators access to resources and confidence in their practice. The use of these resources and networks over time suggests a pedagogical journey that strengthens the transmission of values and production of identity, as learners get older.

It concluded that home-education invites ideological conflict and internal struggle and that the appropriation of new technologies has both freed families from the old structures of school and placed them into new ones. This study sheds light on how some learning communities are transforming and being transformed by the tools used to reach an alternative destination in education. For home-education, the mixed role of new technologies surfaces a series of unresolved tensions, paradoxes and unanswered questions.

Abbreviations

EHE Elective Home-Education

EO   Education Otherwise

CoP Community of Practice

LoP Landscape of Practice

LA   Local Authority

LEA Local Education Authority

MOOC Massively Open Online Course

NoP Network of Practice

OM Online Moderator

GCSE General Certificate of Secondary Education

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 : Introduction

In this introductory chapter, I set out why this thesis is a worthwhile scholarly pursuit. I open the discussion by describing some of the broader changes to schools that have occurred alongside the reported rise in home-education in Britain. I also briefly describe what is known about the population who undertake this educational alternative. With reference to previous literature, I explain how this thesis directly responds to calls for a different kind of research on the topic. More specifically, I set out the rationale for the decision to focus on new technologies, communities and networks in home-education and the gaps in the literature that this work addresses. I close the chapter with a summary of how the thesis is organised.

1.1 Context

This thesis is a story about a community of communities who have come to define and realise the concept of education in a different way from most. The research for this study was undertaken in 2013; then as now, schooling occupied a dominant position in the landscape of education. In 2017, the discourse of schools in 'crisis', 'disillusionment' and 'insecurity' continues to pervade the public eye. Informed by empirical research, this study is an account of the challenges that home-educating families face and the ways in which new technologies both enable and hinder the journey to an alternative destination in education. However, why are some families seeking a different kind of education? To answer this, I must outline some of the broader social, economic and political changes that have fuelled the rise in alternative forms of schooling, but more specifically home-education.

A neoliberal agenda that positions schools as the means to nurture performativity and competition in the global marketplace is widespread in European countries and further afield (Reay et al. 2011). More broadly, learning as the mean to labour market ends has shaped a new world 'educational order' (Field 2009). National policy approaches in the UK have diverged to cater for distinct national contexts. Subsequent changes to the National Curriculum in England have affected every aspect of school life, including the content covered and the exams taken by children and young people (see Ofqual 2014).

Following the introduction of a new National Curriculum in 2014, all children who attend state schools in England are subject to formal literacy and numeracy testing from as young as six years of age (see HM Government 2016a). Moreover, parents in England are assumed to have greater school choice with the creation of 80,000 new 'free school places'- as a result of the *Academies Act 2010* (HM Government 2016b). Nevertheless, some argue that these changes have dismantled

the very notion of a schooling system run by the 'national state' in England (Lees 2013). Whether this is a good thing is another matter entirely.

Education in Wales has also changed. Since devolution, the Welsh Government has also reformed areas of its education system, including the scrapping of formal testing for 10 -1-year-olds and school league tables, instead investing heavily in provision for 3-7-year-olds (known as the foundation phase). Adopted from Scandinavian approaches, the design of the 'foundation phase' is aligned with constructivist theories of learning, which emphasise 'learning through play' and child-initiated activities (Taylor et al. 2016). While early evaluation work has indicated areas of success and enthusiasm in uptake, the long-term impact of the foundation phase in reducing inequalities in educational attainment remains to be seen (Taylor et al. 2016). The launch of the National Literacy and Numeracy Framework in 2014 demonstrated a commitment to raising standards through the early development of strong literacy and numeracy among pupils (Welsh Government 2014a). The notion of rigour, quality and outcomes also extends to design of secondary education in Wales, as evidenced by recent reforms to the qualifications system for 14–19-year-olds (Welsh Government 2014b).

Scotland shares similarities with and points of difference from the recent developments observed in England and Wales. The publication of the National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education (Scottish Gov. 2016a), highlights the Government's commitment to improving attainment, achieving excellence and equality of opportunity for Scottish children. Developing a robust system of national assessment is a mechanism presumed to increase the global competitiveness of the Scottish economy. While education is positioned as the means to labour market ends, in principle the framework is aligned with the wider European commitment to lifelong learning (see Jarvis 2009). Also, contained within this document, is the admission that the education system has not done enough to reduce the association between social class and levels of attainment.

What the education systems across Britiain (England, Wales and Scotland) have in common is the continued production of educational inequalities among learners (see SMF 2016). Thus, not only is the system itself reported to be under strain, but so too are the socially liberating ideals of schooled provision. More specifically, grading promotes extrinsic rather than intrinsic motivations to learn in young pupils (see Illeris 2009). This is arguably at odds with the sorts of skills and motivations needed for a society in which learning is lifelong (Jarvis 2009).

These changes matter because, amidst the current market of 'choice', 'diversity' and maximising standards, the very idea and experience of school are imbued with family anxieties and the forging

of new social structures (Reay et al. 2011). Arguably, this is visible in the increased number of social movements creating alternative spaces in education (see Kraftl 2013). Evidently, some groups have harnessed the opportunities offered because of recent reforms to mainstream provision in England by setting up so-called 'free schools', while other families are 'going against the grain' and moving away from using schools as a focal point of education altogether.

The well-respected educationalist Sir Ken Robinson (2006) famously stated that 'teaching to the test' was the very opposite of what learners need to thrive in an ever-changing world. Schools are apparently educating children out of the qualities and ways of thinking required to solve the complex global problems of our time. Furthermore, in *Creative schools: the grassroots revolution that's transforming education*, Robinson and Aronica (2015) advocate the creation of a more personalised and 'organic' education system; one that nurtures, rather than undermines creativity. The exploitation of technological resources is pivotal for engaging the learners in Robinson's vision of education to come. Beyond the notion of transformation are those who advocate the revolution of education and society. For instance, the more radical ideas held by critical pedagogues call for constructive action against an authoritarian system that actively subjugates individual liberties (see Apple 2006; 2011). Opposition to the repressive nature of existing pedagogical processes in modern schools lies at the heart of this critique (see Giroux 2016). Interestingly, one could view the educative activities and alternative spaces within the Occupy Movement in 2012 as a form of resistance to what Amsler (2015) argued is a much broader neoliberal crisis of hope.[1] Thus, beyond school critiques, the broader project of education is being re-envisioned by some-educationalists.

, Despite the increased visibility of alternative educational philosophies, spaces and social groups in this landscape, the very concept of education without school is weak among academics and policymakers (Lees 2013). If we are to move towards a truly multimodal understanding of 'education', it is important to recognise the *other* in a field predominantly ordered around forms of 'schooled provision'.

1.1.1 Why research home-education?

Pertinently, it is estimated that 80,000–150,000 children in the UK are currently home-educated as a legal and viable alternative to school, a figure that is reportedly rising (The Guardian 2016). Defining home-education is a far more complex task than the name implies. As I have learned throughout the course of this research, the terminology used to describe this form of provision is philosophically conflicting and inherently diverse (Lees 2012). For the purpose of this introduction,

---

[1] For an excellent discussion on the Occupy Movement and other examples of democracy, agency and resistance in informal and formal educational settings see Amsler (2015).

home-education is an educational alternative to that of regularly attending a state-maintained or independent school. It is usually 'carried out' by a parent (often the mother) and is based in and around the home in the place of regular attendance of 'compulsory schooling' (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). There are a host of reasons why parents choose this form of provision, including dissatisfaction with the school environment, philosophical beliefs, children's educational needs and school places (Rothermel 2002; 2011). For detailed discussion on definitional issues, motives and educational approaches, see *Chapter two*.

Rothermel (2015) suggested that UK home-education is more visible in the public sphere than it once was. In 2009, the publication of a review of home-education in England commissioned by the then secretary of state Ed Balls, cast home-education into the media spotlight. The release of the *Badman Review* (2009) was arguably a pivotal moment for the political status of UK home-education and in shaping the reactions of advocates and affiliated communities. More recently, mainstream media headlines have directly connected the rise in home-education to some of the broader developments outlined earlier in this chapter. Sensationalist headlines provide tangible examples of this inferred connection:

> *DIY schooling on the rise as more parents opt for home-education...* (The Guardian, 26 April 2016)

> *Hating the new SATS? Meet the mums who chose home-education over 'sausage factory' schools…* (The Telegraph, 5 May 2016)

Previous research has shown that home-education encompasses diverse ways of thinking and knowing about the place, use and purpose of education and its relation to schooling. Subsequently, Dr Lees, a prominent scholar of home-education, argued that home-education is a subject that might illuminate several topical issues in education. Lees (2013) writes

> If educational research struggles with knowledge of issues around equality, diversity, teaching and learning, social impacts, political policy tensions, the law and education, psychological readiness, teacher relationships, home/school relationships, facilities, resources, texts and technology, power and perversions, democracy in hierarchies … EHE [*Elective Home-education*] has something to offer that illuminates all of these and more. (Lees 2013, p.34)

Lees (2013) concludes that home-education is the new and cutting-edge place to be as a modern educationalist (p.34). Pertinently, I now concentrate on the intellectual motivations for researching this topic. I then provide an overview of previous research while referring to some of the wider technological developments in education. This discussion will demonstrate why this thesis is timely, relevant and worthwhile.

1.1.2 Researcher motivations

When I began this doctorate, I did not hold any relation with or affiliations to home-education. I am not a home-educator, nor was I home-educated. From the age of 5 to 11 years, I was educated in several 'good' state-aided schools in South Africa, where I was born. My earliest recollections of a society rife with inequality and racism (even in 1995) was the corporal punishment given only to my black classmates by my white Afrikaans teacher. Even in 1997, I was acutely aware that, as the child of a white middle-class South African family, I was in the privileged position of being able to access a standard of education unavailable to many. My mother was a music teacher at one of the more typical, and heavily subsidised, state-aided schools. Her most challenging lesson was delivered to a class of 90 with only one xylophone to hand. Many of my classmates did not have running water, let alone school clothes or food to eat at lunchtime. Being educated in a small, rural 'middle school', followed by a large state comprehensive (rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted) in England some years later, was a standard of education unobtainable by the many friends I left behind.

These early experiences of school have implicitly shaped my attitudes, not just towards school but also in the very role of education. In my case, schooling functioned as a gateway towards the potentially prosperous pursuit of sociology. As a social scientist, I have always been fascinated with the lived experience of individuals and groups whose beliefs and values challenge or question dominant ways of understanding the social world. The primary motivations for this thesis were therefore somewhat latent rather than glaringly obvious.

My master's research focused on learner identities and youth transitions, so the topic of home-education was very much new terrain. The ESRC grant that funded this research was a nominated award in the topic of 'alternative schooling'. The research focus was born out of curiosity. I had been reading widely about alternative forms of schooling when I stumbled across literature on home-education.

Reading around the topic was influential in refining the research focus to new technologies. The first few months of this doctorate were spent reviewing an extensive range of sources depicting home-education in England, Wales and Scotland- including newspaper articles, websites, academic literature and personal biographies. I was aware that this was an essential requirement for developing a topic of research that is both meaningful and viable. Flick (2007) advocated the importance of consulting existing empirical findings and theoretical perspectives to avoid 'being naïve when starting research' (p.21). In doing so, Delamont (2002) explains that the apprentice stands to grasp knowledge of the empirical terrain but also an understanding of the cultural context within which her topic of inquiry is located.

It was at this early stage that online searches revealed the existence of an array of Yahoo! and Facebook groups dedicated to supporting home-educators in delivering different activities, styles and methods of home-education in the UK. This collection of sites intended to support home-education groups represent only a tiny fraction of all of the social networking sites, devices and programmes used by families (see Selwyn 2016), and little is known about the role of online networks and other new technologies for alternative groups who equally constitute the landscape of education. To the best of my knowledge, no study has comprehensively explored how these could feature in the practice of home-education in Britain. As well as appealing to previous research interests, the choice of this topic, therefore, appeared to offer important and fertile grounds for research.

1.1.3 Previous research

Most empirical research on home-education derives from studies undertaken in the United States. Research within this context has focused on the academic and social outcomes and issues concerning the rights of parents, children and the state, as well as on classifying the characteristics and motives of home-educators (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). The dominant profile of home-educators in the US is conservative Christians who practise school at home.

In the UK, the comparatively small body of empirical research has primarily focused on the rationales for home-education and the experiences and practises of home-educators. Although educational approaches and styles are diverse and vary from family to family, some scholars suggest that a larger proportion of families do not primarily home-educate due to their religious beliefs and instead adopt autonomous and child-led approaches to their practice. It has been suggested that there has been an increase in the number of families who home-educate primarily due to their dissatisfaction with state provision, and a lack of support for special educational needs.

In the most comprehensive review of scholarship on home-education in the English language, Kunzman and Gaither (2013) pointed to the overall lack of numerical data on home-education. Specifically, they noted the anecdotal nature of a body of research which was almost entirely qualitative. This stems from the tendency for home-education advocates and organisations to exercise an implicit bias towards the practice of home-education. An in-depth discussion on partisanship and home research is provided in *Chapter two*. Overall, scholars have highlighted the need for more tightly focused and empirically driven research (McAvoy 2015).

1.1.4 New technologies: an unexplored avenue

In a landscape of interactive educational programmes including; online distance learning courses, blogs, YouTube and social media platforms; are hundreds of Yahoo! and Facebook groups dedicated to supporting different groups and practises in home-education. Many of these online groups support offline communities located across various areas of the UK. Education Otherwise, a national charity, provides links to many of these groups on their website, which states that:

> *Home-educators around the UK have organised themselves into local groups, providing mutual support, sharing information and resources, and often meeting regularly for social and educational activities* (educationotherwise.net 2015)*.*

In 2012, when this doctorate commenced, there were over 250 'visible[2]' Yahoo! groups for home-education with a combined membership of over 18,000. This is significant when considering the proliferation of online media technologies that facilitate the establishment of networked communities, uniting groups of people within the umbrella of shared interests and beliefs and enabling both online and offline ties. The interactions that take place within these communities offer new possibilities for learning that may have important implications for how we understand home-education. Wider developments in technology-enhanced education point towards a very different pedagogical context for both educators and learners (see Selwyn 2016).

However, the role of the internet and new technologies in home-education is one of the areas that have been given the least tightly focused research attention. Scholarship within the US has suggested that new technologies have made home-education easier for some families, though whether access to the internet has directly contributed to the suggested rise in home-education remains to be seen. Evidence of the role of new technologies in home-education in Britain is anecdotal and significantly underdeveloped. Much of the evidence for the influence of new technologies in home-education exists on blogs or news media sites (Lees 2013). Based on her doctoral work on the discovery and understanding of home-education among parents living in England, Lees (2013) suggested that new technologies are likely to play a special role in the decision to home-educate.

Moreover, McAvoy (2015) asserted that home-education is likely to have already been transformed through the existence of these technologies. Consequently, he supposed that such technologies may have democratised home-education further, in terms of the resources and curricula available to learners engaged in this form of educational provision. At the same time, however, McAvoy

---

[2] The term visible deployed here refers to the domains and group sites that were readily retrieved, and thus identifiable using basic search functions on the platforms of Yahoo! Groups and Facebook.

postulated that new digital-based inequalities in home-education may have emerged. Subsequently, McAvoy (2015) calls for extensive research in this area.

To the best of my knowledge, no study has comprehensively addressed the role of new technologies in British home-education. This thesis, therefore, seeks to make a timely and significant contribution to this under-researched area.

1.2   Research questions

This study sought to explore the place, use and purpose of new technologies, online networks and communities in home-education. Subsidiary to this was the consideration of the extent to which home-education might have been reconfigured because of the availability and use of new technologies.

Three core research questions informed the beginning, middle and end of this story. In *Chapter two*, the gaps in the literature that each of these questions intended to address are described in greater depth. I will now set out and expand on the research inquiry below:

> *1. How have different home-education groups organised themselves through the appropriation of new technologies and in what ways does this affect the construction of knowledge about home-education online?*
>
> *2. What is the place of online networks and communities in the discovery of home-education and how is this significant for families at the point of entry?*
>
> *3. How and in what ways do online networks facilitate pedagogical practices and identities and what are the consequences of this for the function of home-education?*

On one level, this thesis is about how new technologies have enabled and changed communities through the emergence of online networks. Threaded throughout this story is an account of how knowledge, group structures and identities are generated, challenged and sustained. A component of this is how new technologies and participation in different networks and communities have democratised home-education.

The inquiry also closely examines how new technologies, online networks and communities, together, and in a variety of ways, enable the pedagogic life of home-educating families. This narrative, therefore, shows the ways in which the influence of new technologies paradoxically helps and hinders the delivery of an educational alternative rooted in social principles. In this way, the components of the findings suggest an education alternative that is rooted in both 'sameness and difference', 'unity and division' and 'freedom and surveillance'. These threads are central to my

account of what home-education is with the presence of new technologies, networks and communities.

1.3   Thesis outline

The thesis is organised into nine chapters. *Chapter two* reviews the policy context and the academic literature on home-education in Britain, with a focus on England. This includes the legal context, definitions and recent policy developments in England, Wales and Scotland. I also explore the characteristics of families who home-educate, their motivations and styles, and the educational approaches they use. Considering recent developments in digital education, I demonstrate that a focus on new technologies would supplement previous work on the everyday practises of groups and families who home-educate in England and neighbouring countries. The remainder of the chapter considers the feature of partisanship and the role of the media in home-education. I outline the modern political context, contestation and dilemmas that have shaped who researches home-education and how it is researched. In this way, the need for empirically driven studies in this area is clearly set out.

In the third chapter, I describe the mixed methods research design and tools used to generate the data presented in this thesis. Here the methodological and ethical issues associated with researching parents, children and young people in several different settings is discussed. I also elaborate on the challenges of my position as a researcher on the periphery of home-education and on how this shaped my techniques and conduct. *Chapter four* covers the process of analysis and the development of my conceptual toolkit. In this chapter, I explain how the mixed methods data were analysed and what processes were used to elicit themes. I then outline how I selected and applied concepts from Bernstein's theory of educational transmissions (1975), Communities of Practice theory (Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) and Bourdieu's theory of capitals (1986). The ways in which this complementary collection of concepts shaped the presentation of my findings is also explained.

Chapters five through to *nine* present the findings of this thesis. The chapters mirror my engagement with the mixed methods data, conceptual toolkit and previous research. *Chapter five* is the most descriptive of all the findings chapters. Primarily, it serves to demonstrate the empirical foundations for arguments developed in the later chapters. In part, *Chapter five* addresses the first research question, and in doing so provides an overview of the similarities and differences between home-educating families. Specifically, I explore the ways in which families with different interests and needs in home-education have used new technologies to create, support and extend some of the communities and networks that exist in home-education.

Chapter six also corresponds to my first research question. In this chapter, I draw on the use and effects of social networking during the *Badman Review* (2009) to illustrate a period when communities in home-education were both united and divided. My focus here is also on how the structures and relations online shape the information about home-education available to members who participate in Yahoo! and Facebook groups. Crucially, I position this as a case that demonstrates how the appropriation of new technologies can hinder the social and democratic principles rooted in their intended pedagogical practices.

Chapter seven explores the role of communities and online networks in the decision to home-educate. To address the second research question, I outline different reasons and two overarching decision-making processes leading to entry into home-education. I compare the accounts of experienced home-educators with those who had only recently decided to home-educate. In doing so, I demonstrate that parents command different levels of resources at the point of realising that home-education was a valid alternative to schooling. Subsequently, it is suggested that new technologies have changed how, when and where the discovery of home-education takes place. I also consider what these findings might mean for the democratisation of this alternative in education

The final chapter addresses the third research question. Drawing on the accounts of different interviewee groups (see *Chapter three* for details), I discuss how online networks and new technologies support a variety of educational approaches, styles, techniques and methods used in home-education. I draw attention to the challenges faced by parents, children and young people at different points in their home-education journey. The ways in which participation in online networks and offline communities facilitated a sense of emotional support towards realising a vision of education without school among parents is also described. Moreover, I also show how the use of new technologies allows learners to develop their social networks and sense of identity. It is concluded that the nature of parental and learner participation sustains pedagogical relations that are not better than but different from those observed in schools. In this way, I challenge the rhetoric that home-education offers greater freedom to learners than schooled provision. Finally, I draw on the reflections of parents and young people nearing the end of their home-education journey to critically revisit the unresolved tensions evident in the shared enterprise of home-education.

In *Chapter nine* I reflect on the findings of this research and consider the extent to which home-education has been reconfigured. This chapter reflects on the methodological and conceptual

strengths and limitations of this research and how it has extended the field of home-education and contributed to some of the wider debates in digital education. I explain how the research questions have been answered and what contributions have been made and I identify areas that could be taken forward in future research.

Chapter 2 : Home-education: a review of recent literature

2.1 Introduction

A promising yet relatively small body of academic scholarship on home-education in the UK has emerged over the last few years. In this chapter, I draw on a range of sources to describe the foundations and empirical realities of home-education in this domestic setting.[3] The chapter is organised thematically. First, I untangle the multiple terminologies used to define home-education. The contemporary legal and political developments in home-education in Britain, with a focus on England and Wales is considered. I then discuss previous research on the characteristics, rationales, methods and practices of the families who undertake this educational alternative. With a focus on the rise of new technologies, the unanswered questions and gaps in the field are set out. In the latter sections, I reflect on the ways in which partisanship has shaped the methodologies and approaches used to research home-education; this, coupled with the potentially diverse and fluid nature of home-education, means that empirically driven studies in this area are well founded and much needed. More specifically, it is argued that research focusing on the role of new technologies would vitally extend and further develop previous understanding of the kinds of communities, social practices, identities and pedagogies thought to exist in home-education. Moreover, it is argued that future work in this area necessitates a departure from the problematic tendency to position home-education as both better than and different from school (Pattison 2015).

2.2 Defining home-education

Defining home-education is an inherently difficult task. The concepts used to describe it are numerous and often applied interchangeably in the academic, official and popular literature. Several of these terms include 'education otherwise', 'unschooling', 'autonomous education', 'home-based education', 'home-schooling', 'home-schooling' and, more recently, 'elective home-education'. As outlined in *Chapter one*, home-education broadly refers to a practice that is carried out in and around the home in place of compulsory schooling (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). However, the assumption that home-education happens in the home, and thereby, devoid of the possibility of a school-based education is blurred (Morton 2011). This is apparent when considering the practice of 'flexi-schooling' or 'flexible-schooling', which is defined as:

> [A]n arrangement between the parents and school where the child is registered at school in the usual way but where the child attends the school only part time; the rest of the time

---

[3] Most of the empirical contributions to the field of home-education research originate in North America (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). However, the legal, political, and social differences between home-education in the US and in the UK render direct empirical and theoretical applications problematic. Thus, while the review has utilised literature from a variety of different national contexts (including the US), it mostly focuses on home-education in the UK.

the child is home-educated (effectively on authorised absence from school). Flexi-schooling is a legal option provided that the head teacher at the school agrees to the arrangement. (Rose, cited in Gutherson and Mountford-Less 2011, p.3)

Equally, home-educators also practise 'school at home' by following a formal curriculum and/or arranging for qualified tutors to teach their child lessons at home (Badman 2009). Yet the extent to which this educational alternative is 'synonymous' with the home is unclear when considering the informal learning spaces outside the home within which 'home-education' can also take place (e.g. in museums and/or supermarkets) (Kraftl 2014). 'Unschooling' or 'deschooling', however, refers to a distinct educational style rooted in experiential learning (Thomas and Pattison 2007). In contrast to the more structured approaches associated with time-tabled lessons, learning is both child-led and informal. Unschooling, on the other hand, is rooted in the philosophical foundations of the author John Holt (1967), whose work is aligned with constructivist theories of learning and child-initiated activities.

The terminology used to describe home-education also reflects national and political contexts. For instance, the term 'home-schooling', rather than home-education, is most commonly understood to refer to home-education in the US (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). It also invokes the assumption that it is an educational alternative synonymous with both the home and schooling.

More recently, English and Welsh policymakers have deployed the term 'elective home-education'. The concept of electing, however, presupposes choice and thus a degree of agency in the undertaking of home-education. Yet, previous research has shown that for some families who exit school, the decision to home-educate was both a last resort and their only option (see Section 2.5 for further discussion). Most UK-based researchers working in the field use the term home-education rather than home-schooling.

Evidently, the selection and application of different terminology reflects an inherently conflicted legal, ideological, social and political field of discourse (see Lees 2013). While the variety of names used to refer to home-education might mirror the diverse rationales, methods and practices (Morton 2011), arguably it also contributes to an incoherent and sometimes 'undiscoverable' body of literature. While not wishing to oversimplify the complex nature of this conceptual terrain, for the sake of consistency the term 'home-education' will be used in this thesis to encompass the broad range of attitudes, rationales, philosophies, methods and practises of families.

2.3   The rise of home-education

In this section, I draw on relevant literature and legislation to describe the historical and legal foundations linked to the rise of UK home-education. I then concentrate on some of the more recent

political developments in the Britain, with a focus on England and Wales. As will become clear, this legal and political context has implications for individuals planning to access and carry out research on this topic.

2.3.1 Historical development

Before the changes in education during the 20th century (see Bolton 2012), the education of children outside formal institutions was a somewhat 'normalised' reality for the majority (Bendell 1987). This was a distinct period when the "family and the home were at the centre of education" (Morton 2011, p.26). Despite the increased availability of state-funded elementary schooling after 1918,[4] a few middle-class families continued to educate their children at home, usually using a tutor (Bendell 1987). It was also a period when the home-education advocate Charlotte Mason (1904;1930) contested the notion of a utilitarian education in favour of educating children in what she termed 'living ideas'. The significance of Mason's philosophical approach and practical advice has meant that she is now often regarded as one of the founders of the early home-education movement in the UK (Boulter 1989, cited in Morton 2011). Notably, the later works of the US author and educator John Holt (1977;1984;1997) and educational theorists such as Illich (1970; 1976) were also of importance to the home-education movement in the UK and the US during the 1960s/1970s (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). However, the philosophical and historical underpinnings for the contemporary home-education movement in the UK today remain inherently disputed (Aurini and Davies 2005).

The *1944 Education Act* extended free education to include all state secondary schools. With it saw the common national distinction between primary and secondary education at age 11, as well as the introduction of the tripartite system (grammar, technical and modern) to secondary-level education (Bolton 2012, p.3). After the Second World War, home-education appeared to evaporate from 'public consciousness' until the late 1970s argued Morton (2011, p.26). The court case of Irish Harrison, who faced difficulties with the authorities over her decision to home-educate, not only revived public attention, but also led to the setting up of the UK charity Education Otherwise in 1977. Education Otherwise is now a "large self-help organisation which offers support and information to its members" (Education Otherwise.net 2010, no page number).

Since then, key scholars have cited what appears to have been a steady growth in home-education across the UK, Europe more widely, and the US (see Allan and Jackson 2010; Apple 2000; Arora

---

[4] Public elementary education became virtually free to all with the abolishment of fees in these schools from 1918 (Bolton, 2012). Before this time, acquiring a formal elementary education in the UK was only obtainable by an elite minority of families (Bendell 1989).

2003; Beck 2006; Belfield 2004; Conroy 2010; Hanna 2012; Hopwood et al. 2007; Kunzman and Gaither 2013; Lees 2011; Meighan 2001a; 2001b; Monk 2004; Neuman and Aviram 2015; Petrie 1992; 2001; Ray 1994; 1999; Rothermel 1999; 2002; 2011; Safran 2008; 2010). I discuss the characteristics of the home-education population in the UK in Section 2.5 of this chapter.

Writing about the context of home-education in North America nearly three decades ago, Mayberry and Knowles (1989) argued that the growth of the home-education movement epitomises the parental desire to reverse centuries of pervasive state control over the education of their children (Mayberry and Knowles 1989, p.172). Alternatively, Neuman and Aviram (2003) suggested that home-education is not only a break from the past, but that it is also a social phenomenon that is entirely new and distinct from that which has previously been researched. However, whether the current phenomenon of home-education can be described as a broader 'social movement' is contested (see Kunzman and Gaither 2013).

However, others such as Apple (2007) and Lubienski (2000; 2003) contested such claims, instead arguing that home-education signals a return to modern forms of education characterised by a neoliberal ideology, growing individualism and the development of markets. Subsequently, Lubienski (2000) proposed that home-education signifies the withering away of the public good and the fuelling of populist anxieties for societies (Conroy 2010). Alluding to the importance of wider structural developments, Furedi (2001) attributed the growth of home-education to the technological, social and political advancements of liberal societies that foster a 'paranoid parenting' culture of fear.

Moreover, Aurini and Davies (2005) challenged the sociological explanations centred on the growth of neoliberal ideology and on pressures associated with the acquisition of human capital and class reproduction. Instead, they situated the growth of the home-education movement in North America within the wider context of private education: "the encouragement of the market consumer, class reinforcement, human capital and 'expressive logics'" (Aurini and Davies 2005, p. 461). Home-education is regarded as one of the most exclusive forms of private education, only financially accessible to a few (Aurini and Davis 2005)

However, these differences could be explained by the differing historical development of the North American home-schooling movement as well as the wider cultural context within which its development was rooted (Morton 2011). Stevens (2001) suggested that the North American movement arose from and is still characterised today by two very ideologically distinct groups: 'the religious fundamentalists' and the 'unschoolers' (Stevens 2001, cited in Aurini and Davies 2005, p.464). Stevens (2001) defined 'the religious fundamentalists' as primarily a group of right-wing

Christians in North America. The 'unschoolers', however, were a group of mostly left-wing home-educators who sought to challenge the status quo of the state in mainstream schooling. 'The religious fundamentalists' typically utilised Christian-based curricula, whereas 'unschoolers' oriented their practice towards 'grass-roots' theories of learning (Stevens 2001, cited in Aurini and Davies 2005, pp.464–465).

Though the exact historical roots of the home-education movement in the UK are contested, arguably they derive from social, political and economic contexts that are very dissimilar to those within North America and the US (Meighan 2001a). Therefore, although theorisations arising from research on home-education in the US may provide valuable insight, the extent to which direct empirical applications can be to the home-education in Britain is limited.

The research on home-education from English-speaking countries has predominantly focused on the Canadian, North American or Australian context, though there undoubtedly exists more research on home-education from non-English-speaking countries, e.g. Spain and even Germany (where home-education is illegal) (Lees 2011). Notably, 'home-schooling' (as it is predominantly known) is currently a large, established and 'normalised' educational alternative in the US (Stevens 2003). The body of literature that pertains to it is extensive and very different from the literature on home-education in the UK (see Kunzman and Gaither 2013). Scholars have concentrated their efforts on quantifying the differences between the educational, psychological and social outcomes of home-educated and mainstream-schooled children. Predominant themes included defining the social, political and ideological characteristics of families who home-educate (see Cahatham-Carpenter 1994; Delahooke 1986; Olivera et al. 1994; Quaqish 2007; Ray 2010; Ross 2010; Rothermel 2002; Saunders 2010; Sorey and Duggan 2008; Sutton and Galloway 2000; White et al. 2009).

2.3.2   Legality and rights

The legal foundations for home-education in England, Wales and Scotland are similar. The primary piece of legislation for these countries comes from the *1944 Education Act*, now reinstated in Section 7 of the *1996 Education Act*, under the duty of parents to secure education for children of compulsory school 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.

The right to home-educate in England and Wales falls under the inclusion of the word 'otherwise' (Education Otherwise 2010a). What a 'suitable' education is or should involve is not defined in the *1996 Education Act*. The term 'efficient education' is broadly defined in case law as "an education that achieves what it sets out achieve" (DCSF 2013, p.5).[5] Home-education places responsibility for a child's education solely with the parents. Under Section 436A of the *1996 Education Act*, together with the *Education and Inspections Act 2006*, Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to make known the identities of children of compulsory school age who are not receiving a suitable education. Although no statutory duties exist for Local Authorities to monitor home-education, Section 437(1) gives Local Authorities the power to intervene by serving a notice in writing to parents to obtain evidence that a child is receiving a suitable and efficient education (within 15 days). However, Local Authorities are encouraged to address situations informally before escalating issues to formal procedures, i.e. school attendance orders (Department for Children, Schools and Families 2007; 2013, p.5).

Thus, the legality of home-education in Britain is clear. However, there is debate on whether the civic right to home-educate is fundamentally a human right (Anthony 2015). At the epicentre of this lies the role of state in protecting the well-being of children while also preserving the rights of parents to choose and alternative for their children (Conroy 2010). What the balance of power should be within this trio is inherently disputed (see Kunzman and Gaither 2013).

More recently, Waterman (2016) argued that the law in England and Wales has prioritised the rights of parents over those of children and that children should not be allowed to 'disappear from birth', as the law presently allows. Drawing on a case in Germany and the US, Monk (2015) delved into the moral and civic issues that underpin the right to home-educate. He illuminated the inherent tensions between state intervention and individual liberties that are apparent in debates about whether concerns challenge or legitimise home-education as a human right. Monk (2015) is sympathetic to the argument that home-education is an essential component of democracy, but at the same time he highlighted the fact that "concerns about home-education are equally informed

---

[5] A suitable and efficient education is defined as "[o]ne that primarily equips a child for life within the community of which he is a member rather than the way of life in the country as a whole, as long as it does not foreclose the child's options in later years to adopt some other form of life if he wishes to do so" (R. v. Secretary for State for Education and Science, cited in '*Elective home-education guidelines for Local Authorities authorities*', Department for Children, Schools and Families 2013, p. 5)

by democratic principles" (p.175). He positioned home-education and the responses to it as a fruitful area to explore the very meaning, role and purpose of democratic education.

However, the 'optimistic' assumption that a parent is equipped to determine a child's best interests assumes that parental interests and needs are harmonious with those of their children (Marples 2014). Marples (2014) concluded that granting a measure of choice to parents who act as trustees on behalf of their children is indisputable. He argued that what matters "is the basis upon which the choice is made" (p.28). High-profile cases such as the tragic death of Kyra Ishaq (Woolcock 2016) and Dylan Seabridge (see Pollock 2016) have refocused the spotlight on some of the sensitive issues regarding the current legalities of home-education in Britain. What follows is an account of the more recent policy developments and political upheavals for home-education in England and Wales.

2.3.3 The Badman Review: home-education in England

On behalf of the Government, the then Secretary of State Ed Balls, commissioned Graham Badman to conduct an independent review of 'elective home-education' in England in 2009. The review was commissioned following the death of Kyra Ishaq[6], in response to what some scholars viewed as 'overzealous' fears that home-education posed an increased risk to safeguarding (Lees 2011). More specifically, the Badman Review (2009) intended to address the alleged difficulties that Local Authorities faced in gaining access to children in cases where it was suspected that home-education was being used as a 'cover' for abuse.

The report, published in June 2009, was based on structured interviews "with a range of stakeholders including home-educating parents and children" (Badman 2009, p.4). The evidence claimed to represent the views of 2,000 home-educators and 90 Local Authorities across England. Based on these findings, Badman (2009) recommended the early and compulsory registration of home-educated children and increased powers for Local Authorities to legally enter homes and interview children without the permission or presence of a parent. However, following an independent inquiry, the Badman recommendations and proposed legal changes motioned in the *Children and Families Bill 2010* were quashed.

Stafford (2012) is critical of the weak evidence base from which Badman drew his recommendations. Stafford claimed that Badman (2009) misinterpreted data to establish causation

---

[6] Kyra Ishaq was a seven year old girl from Birmingham who died in 2008 as a result of neglect and malnutrition. Several months prior to her death, Kyra was formally withdrawn from school by her mother, who was said to be educating her at home. It was reported that Kyra suffered a distressing level of physical abuse in the months, weeks and days prior to her death (see: The Guardian 2010).

between the likelihood of being known to social services and the prevalence of home-education. He argued that complex administrative and legal categories mean that 'being known to social services' "covers not only child protection inquires but also referrals because (concerned) third parties, unaware of the legal right to home-educate, mistakenly contact social services" (p.370). Additionally, Stafford (2012) pointed out that that figures cited in the *Badman Review* (2009) represented the aggregate of referrals to social care and not the number of children (Safford 2012, p.370). Collectively, this created what Stafford (2012) viewed an unreliable and conflated association between being known to social services, risk and home-education.

The Badman Review aimed to recalibrate the balance of rights between the state, parents and children (Lees 2011). The Report and proposed legislative changes were also criticised for their lack of robustness and for pandering to populist fears (Conroy 2010). Many home-educators publicly campaigned to express their objection with the Review's findings. According to Lees (2011), the aftermath perpetuated further interrelations of fear and mistrust in home-education.

The findings that emerged after the Select Committee Inquiry (2010) found no evidence to substantiate Badman's assertion that home-education was being used as a cover for child abuse. At the same time, however, it is also worth pointing out that the evidence collated from this inquiry did not definitively ruled out that it wasn't either. Of course, knowing that it would give policymakers an ability to make a risk calculation, warranted or not, requires a more representative picture of the home-education population, something that neither policymakers, academics or other interested parties have at this moment in time.

In addition to amplifying relations of mistrust, the Badman Review (2009) echoed the much broader assumption that education was synonymous with school (Morton 2011). Consequently, it has been argued that the Review disenfranchised 'autonomous home-educators', many of whom do not follow a formal curriculum (Morton 2011). Pattison (2015) asserted that the Review thus thwarted any attempt to envisage education without school.

Previously, the assumption that education is synonymous with school has exacerbated conflict between some home-educating parents and Local Authorities (see Petrie 2001; Lees 2011). Thus, although home-education is a legal and viable educational alternative in the UK, some have argued that it is typically represented as inferior to mainstream provision, or subpar (Lees 2013). Webb (2010) suggested that home-education and school are incomparable, despite the apparent tendency for those 'outside home-education' to compare them. This assumption was visible throughout the Badman Review (2009). For example, the statement that home-educators should

seek to develop an appropriate curriculum for 'elective' home-education assumes that a curriculum is a prerequisite for the delivery of a broad and balanced education.[7]

However, as mentioned in *Chapter one*, education is multimodal and, as I discuss in the following sections of this chapter, some home-educating families draw on alternative educational approaches, styles and methods in their pursuit of an alternative education. For a more detailed discussion of the *Badman Review* (2009) and community reactions, see Section 2.9.2.

Following the election of the Coalition Government in 2010, and the Conservative Government in 2015, no further proposals or explicit guidance has been issued for home-education in England by the Department for Education. Until evidence is presented to the contrary, one can only assume that legislative changes are a distant, rather than immediate, possibility.

2.3.4 Consultations and guidance in Wales

The Badman Review (2009) also captured the attention of policymakers in the Welsh Government. Following what was, and still is, a continued period of inactivity in England since 2009, the Department for Education and Skills have undertaken various consultations and issued its own guidance on home-education; see Table 2.3.4 below for details.

<u>Table 2.3.4: 'Elective home-education' developments in Wales</u>

---

i.   'Scoping research of Elective Home-education' (Welsh Gov. 2012)

ii. 'Written statement – Elective Home-education – Analysis of responses to the Welsh Governments' consultation on proposals to introduce a compulsory registration and monitoring scheme for those who elect to educate their children at home' (Welsh Gov. 2014)

iii. 'Consultation on Non-Statutory Guidance document on Elective Home-education, for Local Authorities' (Welsh Gov. 2015a)

iv. Non-statutory guidance for Local Authorities on Elective Home-education (Welsh Gov. 2015b)

v.   Ministerial Statement on Elective Home-education Guidance (Welsh Gov. 2015c)

---

[7] The report stated that: "[f]urther thought should be given to what constitutes an appropriate curriculum within the context of elective home-education. Such a curriculum must be sufficiently broad and balanced and relevant to enable young people to make suitable choices about their life and likely future employment" (Badman 2009, p.8).

Following a consultation on proposals to introduce a compulsory registration and monitoring scheme for those who home-educate in Wales, in May 2014 Huw Lewis (Minister for Education and Skills) announced that the Welsh Government would not legislate as part of the Education Wales Bill (Welsh Government 2014). Instead, the Department for Education and Skills developed non-statutory guidance for Local Authorities engaged in supporting home-educating families (see Welsh Government 2016 for the final draft). In his earlier ministerial statement, however, Huw Lewis summarised the clear and evidently disparate perspectives of parents, key stakeholders, and Local Authorities:

> The consultation revealed a clear divide in opinion. The majority of home-educating parents, home-educated children and young people and organisations representing home-educating families were strongly opposed to the introduction of any form of legislation. However, the majority of Local Authorities (LAs) and organisations with responsibility for children were of the opinion that legislation was necessary to ensure home-educated children were receiving a suitable education. (Ministerial Statement, Welsh Government, 06 May 2014, no page number)

His statement alludes to the damaged relations and mistrust between home-education communities and 'Government officials'. It seems that not only are legislative areas still highly contested nearly five years after the Badman Review (2009), but that the relations between some sectors of the home-educating population and Government officials have not substantially improved.

Although England and Scotland's educational policies operate under separate systems of law and parliaments, home-education policies are broadly similar. The only difference visible in the *Education (Scotland) Act 1980*, is that if a parent/carer chooses to withdraw a child enrolled in a state school, they are required to obtain Local Authority (LA) consent to do so. At the same time, however, guidance states that "the Local Authority must not unreasonably withhold consent" (Scottish Government 2016b, no page number). The most recent guidance on local education authority monitoring protocols and procedures is like those for England and Wales (see Scottish Government 2007). Currently there is no evidence to suggest that Scotland's legislative position on home-education is likely to diverge from the positions observed in England and Wales in the immediate future.

2.4 Home-educating families: numbers and characteristics

The precise number of children currently receiving home-education across England and Wales is unknown. This is simply due to the lack of official records and the small-scale nature of

independently orchestrated studies. Thus, data on the characteristics and numbers of home-educating families should be approached with caution.

Previous efforts to 'scope' these figures were made by Petrie (1992) and Lowden (1994), for example, who surveyed LAs (LEAs, as they were formerly known). They estimated that around 3,000–5,000 children were home-educated, an estimate that is now dated. A decade after Petrie's (1992) and Lowden's (1994) research, a commissioned feasibility study of UK home-education by Hopwood et al. (2007) estimated that around 16,000 children were then currently home-educated, suggesting a significant growth. However, Hopwood et al. (2007) also suggested that a comprehensive assessment of the number of home-educated children would be infeasible, a result of the lack of compulsory registration (Morton 2011).

The organisation Education Otherwise estimated the number of home-educated children known to Local Authorities in England and Wales to be 20,000 (Education Otherwise 2010b). They suggested that this figure doubled, to a total of 40,000 home-educated children, when including those children who were not officially known to LAs (Education Otherwise 2010b). However, the projections offered by national organisations are limited in that not all families choose to be members. Alternatively, as Morton (2011) pointed out, families may be members of more than one national, regional and/or local organisation at any one time, thus artificially inflating numbers.

In the early stages of this study, I consulted data produced by the *School Census* in January 2013. According to this sweep of findings, approximately 8.2 million pupils were attending all schools in England (4.3 million in state-funded primary and 3.2 million in state-funded secondary, and 579,700 pupils attended independent schools) (Department of Education 2013). In addition to this, statistics produced by the Welsh Government, reported in July 2013, showed that the total number of pupils in local-authority-maintained schools was 464,868. Of that number, 1,577 children of compulsory school age were classified as being educated 'other than at school', while 1,103 children were reported to be 'educated at home' (Welsh Government 2013). While there may be more families who home-educate in England, research suggests that, as a proportion of national populations, there may be more families who home-educate in Wales than in England (Hopwood et al. 2007). However, given the relatively small sample sizes, I would caution against making any such statements. The slight difference in numbers could instead simply indicate that more home-educating families are known to their Local Authorities in Wales than in England. There could be a whole host of reasons for this, but this area is beyond the scope of this discussion.

More recently, using a nationally representative sample of 6,000 households obtained from the *Opinions and Lifestyle Survey*, Smith and Nelson (2015) found that 52 families were engaged in home-education in England. Smith and Nelson (2015) projected that 1% of all families in England "with dependent children have home-educated either on a full- or part-time basis" (p.1). They also found that provision was 'episodic', which reflects the fluidity of home-education. They concluded that home-educating families are likely to be a small and diverse social group. I discuss the fluid nature of home-education practice in Section 2.6 of this chapter.

2.4.1 Geography

Broadly, the little research that does exist in this area suggests that the population of home-educating families in Britain are unevenly scattered across regions (Fortune-Wood 2005). Precise numbers of home-educating families by region are sparse, and so assessing distribution of the population is not possible. Gathering further data on the localities of home-educating families would usefully add to the empirical work in this area.

However, in their initial survey of 248 home-educators across England, Scotland and Wales, Hopwood et al. (2007) found a 'dramatic' distinction between the sorts of localities within which home-educating families lived. Only one family within their sample described their locality as 'inner city', while 49% identified as being 'urban dwellers', 8% as 'suburban dwellers', 16.5% as living in 'semi-rural' areas and 25% as living in 'rural areas'. In Hopwood et al.'s (2007) findings it is not clear whether the remaining 1.5% of their sample identified as dwelling in urban areas; however, they suggest that, overall, 57% of their sample lived in or around a city (p.17). Based on their findings, Hopwood et al. (2007) inferred that income may be a barrier to home-educating in inner-city areas; dissuasive Local Authorities and a lack of regular internet access and support are further reasons why there may be fewer home-educators dwelling in inner city areas. Alternatively, these factors could also be a product of a low response rate for this group. Further exploring the ways in which locality affect different experiences of home-education is important for capturing a more recent snapshot of the demographic make-up of this population (see Kraftl 2014).

2.4.2 Social characteristics

Previous research to scope the occupational positions and compositions of parents and children in households has shown that the home-education population come from 'all walks of life'. Thus, they are not confined to a family type, occupational class, professional background or ethnic group (Nelson 2013, p.68).

In the largest survey to be conducted on home-education in the UK, Paula Rothermel (2002) found that within her sample of 419 home-educating parents (*n* = 1,099 children) only a minority (7.82%)[8] identified themselves as single parents, while 89.73%[9] identified with being in a heterosexual relationship and 2.2%[10] as being in a same-sex relationship. Paula Rothermel's survey is, however, not representative of the implied majority of known home-educators and thus it is hard to ascertain the assumed diversity of home-education (Morton 2011). Regarding interfamilial differences, some authors suggest that the composition of such families, i.e. numbers and ages of children who are home-educated, is diverse (Rothermel 2011).

Regarding the professional background of parents, Rothermel (2002) found that 49% of mothers and 67% of fathers had attended university. Only a small number (26%) had not received any post-compulsory education. The professional groups were lecturers and teachers, with at least one trained teacher in each family (40%). The arts also featured prominently in the professional groups. Process, plant and machine operatives, as well as elementary occupations, constituted 10%, while health professionals (including doctors and nurses) made up a small proportion (4%) of the population sampled.

Fortune-Wood's (2005) study broadly echoed the trends that Rothermel (2002) observed. However, Fortune-Wood (2005) was keen to argue that home-educators are not a stereotypical middle-class elite because their household income and family size meant that they were poorer than average. Social class, however, is an inherently complex concept to measure. Looking at Rothermel (2002) and Fortune-Wood's (2005) work together, it could be argued that home-educating families have a relatively limited command over economic resources but that they are likely to possess high levels of cultural capital (see Jenkins 2002). This is a tentative assertion that requires further empirical substantiation.

However, in her interviews with 34 'experienced' home-educators, Safran (2008) found that fewer than half of parents had obtained their first degree. Thus, evidently there are exceptions to the trends in education levels and occupational social class previously reported by Rothermel (2002) and Fortune-Wood (2005).

---

[8] This figure is significantly lower than in comparison to trends in the wider population. In 2012, the Office for National Statistics reported that 2,975 of 18,188 total families were comprised of 'lone parent families; (with and without dependent children) —)- approximately 16.35% (ONS 2012, p.4).

[9] This figure is slightly higher than in comparison to the proportion of families reported by the ONS (2012) to be made up of 'married couples or 'opposite sex cohabiting' families –at 82.9% (15, 078 of 18,188 families).

[10] This figure is significantly higher in comparison to trends within the wider population. In 2012, the ONS reported a total of 135 'same sex cohabiting' and 'civil partner couple' families —- 0.74% of 18,188 families (ONS 2012, p.4).

Evidently, a lack of comprehensive data, coupled with several under-represented sectors, makes it difficult to draw an accurate profile of this population. Moreover, the tensions and sources of difference between home-educators (see Section 2.6), might have contributed to the under-representation of some groups in some of the best-known studies on home-education. For example, despite the suggested homogeneity, in her analysis of recent literature, D'Arcy (2014) notes that as a group Travellers are not perceived as proper 'home-educators'. D'Arcy (2014) concludes not only that are Travellers disregarded in 'mainstream' home-education literature but also that their choice to home-educate is 'seldom free'.

2.5   Reasons for home-education

The reasons for home-education are diverse (Rothermel 2003). The then *Department for Schools, Children and Families* (England) identified the most common but not 'exhaustive' reasons for home-education as follows:

- Distance from to a local school

- Religious or cultural beliefs

- Philosophical or ideological views

- Dissatisfaction with the school system

- Bullying

- As a short-term intervention for a particular reason

- Child's unwillingness or inability to go to school

- Special educational needs

- Parents' desire for a closer relationship with their children.

(DfSCF 2007, p.3)

The most comprehensive survey research in this area was undertaken by Rothermel (2002; 2003) and Fortune-Wood (2005). I draw on these works in the following discussion.

Based on his research involving 233 home-educators, Fortune-Wood (2005) cited 27 – predominantly practical – reasons associated with children's experiences of school to explain why parents decided to home-educate. These reasons included: academic concerns, bullying, peer pressure, stress, school refusal and a lack of school places. Fortune-Wood's research suggested that the dominant reason for home-education in most cases was bullying. However, the reasons given by participants changed across time. Fortune-Wood (2005) found that bullying as a motivation tended to decline the longer parents had been home-educating. Crucially, as other factors begin to become influential, it is argued, motives drift from being negative, anti-schooling

reasons to more positive, "pro-home-education reasons" (Fortune-Wood 2005, p.29). Fortune-Wood's conclusions are unclear, because although his sample plotted the reasons for home-education against the number of years a family had been home-educating, it is possible that the differences observed across motivations reflected a difference in the philosophies behind rationales, in turn mirroring changes in home-education as opposed to the evolution of the philosophies of each home-educator over time. Fortune-Wood's (2005) findings are also limited in that he did not explain how such motives might be interelated.

Thomas (1998), on the other hand, drew the distinction between parents who decided to home-educate from the outset and parents who decided to withdraw their child/children from school. These two key divisions include some sub-influences (see Table 2.4 below):

<u>Table 2.4: What influences parents to educate their children at home?</u>

(a) Children who did not start school

    Media, reading about home-education, meeting other home-educators

    Perceptions of academic and social limitations of schooling

    Viewing home-education as a continuation when children reach school age

    Influenced by having taken an older child out of school

    Christian values

    Other

(b) Children withdrew from school

    Media, reading about home-education, meeting other home-educators

    Child's dislike of school

    Bullying (including two instances of sexual harassment)

    Belief that the child would achieve more out of school

    Learning difficulties in school

    Dissatisfaction with general school values

    School does not embody Christian values

    Misbehaviour (in school, or at home attributed to school)

    Other

(Source: Thomas 1998, p.29)

Notably, across different rationales, Thomas (1998) found that learning about home-education through books, newsletters and via face-to-face interaction with home-educating families was influential for parents considering it. However, for parents who chose to home-educate from the

outset, their decision was described by Thomas as a gradual process – a contrast to the sudden nature of 'making the break from school' (Thomas 1998, p.40).

More recently, however, Lees (2013), who has extensively researched and written about the discovery of home-education among home-educating parents, conceptualised the *gestalt* switch (see Lees 2011). The *gestalt* switch explains a poignant moment when, after continuous engagement with a variety of materials and conversations with other home-educators, parents came to discover home-education as a viable alternative to school. This was connected to being able to see themselves as home-educators in a positive way (Lees 2013). Moreover, Lees (2011) suggested that email lists, forums and other online technologies were likely to play 'a special role' in reaching the moment of a redefined consciousness. Lees (2013) calls for further work in this area. Little, is known about how the existence of online networks and new technologies may have changed how and when this discovery takes place.

The rationales for home-education have also been conceptualised as inherently connected to ideas and beliefs about what education should achieve (see Fortune-Wood 2005; Thomas and Pattison 2008). As an example, Meighan drew the distinction between i) parents who home-educated in order to achieve 'academic ends' better than those provided by school, and ii) parents who "wanted a different form of education, e.g. autonomous, self-directed learning, self-sufficiency skills" (Meighan 1997, p.3) in the knowledge that school cannot meet these needs. In her discussions with 27 previously home-educated adults, Webb (1999, p.2) found that the 'most obvious' recollections of why participants' parents had decided to home-educate centred on the perceived emotional and educational needs of the child and less on supposedly 'obvious factors' including lifestyle choices and ideological motivations.

However, Webb (1999) pointed out that in all cases there was no one sole reason for home-educating but, rather, a mix of reasons. Although Webb (1999) found no evidence for this in her research, she implied that 'some heavily religious' families home-educate for reasons of which are similar with those of aristocratic predecessors. Contrary to this, in her qualitative research with 34 home-educating families in England and the US, Safran (2008) found that home-educating for religious reasons did not play a significant part in the decision to home-educate. Instead, Safran (2008) found that the main motives for home-educating given by parents centred on the unhappiness experienced by their children at school or the fact "that home-education was an extension of their natural parenting beliefs" (Safran 2008, p.109).

Simon Webb (2010) o additional reasons, including parental dissatisfaction with school provision, and special educational needs, which he suggests are likely to apply to minor difficulties

characteristic of dyslexia, ADHD or dyspraxia (which he classifies as not a severe disability) (Webb 2010 p.21). Webb (2010) does not, however, substantiate these claims.

As Arora (2006) found in her review of the research relating to home-education and special educational needs, much of the published work in this area is based on anecdotal accounts from families (Dowty and Cowlishaw 2002, cited in Arora 2006). Further, in her secondary analysis using data obtained from questionnaires answered by 65 families within one LA, Arora (2006) argues that despite the predominant satisfaction with current home-education arrangements, parents would have "preferred to send their children to school, if their children's special needs could have been met" (p.55). This challenges Meighan's (1997) assertion that if parents express the belief that school cannot meet the needs of their child, it follows that they also believe that they can 'do a better job' than that of school. Evidently, parental perspectives and positions are complex.

However, Meighan's (1997) work is now clearly dated and appears conceptually limited when considering English's (2016) research. In her discourse analysis of one in-depth interview with a Muslim home-educator in Australia, English (2016) found similarities between the motives of this Muslim parent and those of Christian home-educators. In describing this particular parent's reasons for home-education, English observed that:

> She appears to use arguments that construct the local schools as failing and thus, she was managing a risk of being failed by the schools … she argued that the local schools, and their target families, held different values from her family … she was trying to control the context and content of her children's education and to keep it from "explicit" influences … it would protect the religious and social values of her children. (English 2016, p.67)

From the broader perspective of risk and adaptation strategies in education, English (2016) positions the motives for home-education as similar to those found by Vincent and Ball (2006) in their earlier work on middle-class mothers and school choice. English's (2016) analyses offer an alternative and refreshing position from which to view the rationales for home-education. However, the small sample size of English's (2016) research should be taken into consideration.

I will now direct my discussion to an important sub-theme on motives for home-education: the classification of home-educators by their ideological beliefs. For clarity, I use the term 'ideologies' to refer to a range of moral, philosophical and social perspectives held by parents who home-educate.

2.5.1   The classification of home-educators

Previously, scholars have tried to make sense of the motives, rationales and philosophies for home-education by analytically ordering home-educators by 'types'. Both Petrie (1992) and Rothermel

(2003) stated that earliest categorisations of home-educators originate from Blacker's (1981) MEd thesis, undertaken at the University of Sussex, a piece of research which is no longer accessible.

Through 16 interviews with home-educating families, Blacker found three main types of home-educators, which she termed 'competitors', 'compensators' and 'rebels'. According to Petrie (1992 p.17), 'competitors' were "well-qualified and well-read parents" who sought to compete with schools to provide their children with the best form of education possible. In contrast, compensators, who did not necessarily object to the philosophy of mainstream education, were home-educators who tended to home-educate for pragmatic reasons to 'make up' for the ways in which school had failed their children. 'Rebels', on the other hand, "were those home-educators who had chosen an alternative lifestyle, wanting freedom from social institutions" (Petrie 1992, p.17).

However, in her interviews with 34, long-term/'experienced' home-educating parents (home-educating for more than three years) across England (21) and Florida (13), Safran (2008) found no distinct differences in the attitudes and/or perspectives of home-educating parents. However, the sample is too small to be representative of the national picture. Moreover, as a previous home-educator herself, Safran (2008) made use of her own social networks and connections to obtain her sample, and this may have influenced the heterogeneity of the sample by association.

Within the US, other taxonomies attempting to classify home-educators have been produced by Mayberry (1987) and Van Galen (1991;1988). Both taxonomies have been critiqued as unhelpful and simplistic tools offering limited practical application to the context of home-education in the UK. Notably, Van Galen (1991) distinguished between two major groups of 'homeschoolers' based primarily on their motivations: the 'ideologues' and the 'pedagogues'. Home-educators classified as 'ideologues' are those who are fundamentally in ideological opposition to schools, whereas 'pedagogues' are in conflict with the type of pedagogy adopted in traditional forms of education. See also Nemer (2002) for further explanation. Rothermel (2002) argues that this was mostly likely due to the transience between classifications. Nevertheless, English (2016) found similarities between the Muslim home-educator she researched and Van Galen's (1991) concept of ideologues.

However, in the largest study to date, Rothermel's (2002) doctoral research, with 419 home-educators in England, moved away from narrow categorisations. Instead, she originated the 'Rothermel stratum' for classifying the motives of home families into four distinct levels. At level one, Rothermel (2002) distinguishes a 'superficially homogeneous' group. Rothermel found that this group had little in common with one another but "was characterised by a commonality that led them into home-education rather than their denominational beliefs" (Rothermel 2002, p.83).

'Religious' or 'New Age' home-educators in this group initially home-educated for different reasons from those who had removed their child/children from school. However, despite their differences, home-educators were paradoxically somewhat homogenised regarding their shared concern for parental involvement and commitment to their children. These views also extended to what Rothermel (2002) argued was a new social consciousness that extended beyond "the role of parenting to concern about society and the planet more generally" (Rothermel 2002, p.83).

Rothermel's (2002) distinction supports observations made by Stevens (2001, p.197) in his research:

> It was not their ways of life, or religious beliefs, that divided them in the end, but rather their different sensibilities about how to organize. [...] As with so many soured relations, the crucial points of disagreement long went unnoticed, lurking just beyond the pale of explicit discussion, even if one took the time to look for them, cared to see. (Stevens 2001, p.198, cited in Rothermel 2002, p.84)

At level two, Rothermel (2002) distinguishes between 'group differences'. This involves considering the extent to which home-educators felt that they shared commonalities, such as religious beliefs or methods for home-educating, e.g. structured or unstructured approaches. Although their reasons for home-education were different, Rothermel (2002) identified their shared desire to gain a sense of 'community' after making the decision to home-educate. These groups were not necessarily all home-education based, with some families joining other groups within their respective wider communities. Level three of the Rothermel stratum points to distinctions in parental attitudes about parenting styles, and included in this were families who home-educated from the outset and those where children were removed from school (Rothermel 2002, pp.84–85). At level four, Rothermel described significant interfamilial differences – i.e. both within and between immediate and extended family. This included differences in the reactions expressed by grandparents, siblings and spouses, i.e. convincing 'reluctant' fathers to home-educate (Rothermel 2002, p.95).

Rothermel (2002) argues that her findings show that home-educators and their families are not a monolithic group. She goes on to say that diversity has given, and continues to give, the home-education movement in the UK increased strength, something that she suggests is not a new concept (see Monk 2004). The Rothermel stratum is useful in that it directs our attention away from organising home-educators into artificial absolute categories while emphasising the range of opinions held by those within the field. However, Rothermel (2011) later "called an end to neat categorisations of home-educators", suggesting that the picture of home-education has become more complex (p.22).

More recently, based on her interviews with 19 home-educating families, Morton (2011) grouped home-educators into three categories: 'natural', 'social' and 'last resort'. Morton's classification shares similarities with Ofsted's (2010) research in this area. Ofsted (2010) collected data from 15 LA meetings, attended by 120 home-educators and 130 home-educated children (148 parents completed the questionnaire; 158 children and young people also completed it). The categorisations differ in that Ofsted conceptualised religious home-educators as belonging to a 'philosophical group', while Morton (2011) classified religious home-educators as belonging to a 'social group'.

Furthermore, based on his research on home-educating parents in Norway, Beck (2010) identifies four common frames in the motives for home-education. These were 'structured', 'unschooling', 'pragmatic' and 'unknown'. Beck (2010) describes the social motivation for home-education as being "related to the deficiency in the student's social frames rather than more personal motives like pedagogical and religious (life orientation). Motives were connected to problems at school and parents who want to spend more time with their children" (p.71). Thus, Beck (2010) argues that the motives of parents who home-educate have changed to reflect more social, motivated values. Beck (2010) found that the main reason parents did not home-educate in 2006 was due to the perceived absence of the school community, while the importance of religious motivations decreased. He goes on to assert that "a new socially motivated home-education could be an attempt to reconstruct the everyday modern life and seeks to recruit participants from all social classes" (Beck 2010, p.79). Although Beck's work relates to home-education in a different national context, his suggestions, alongside those of Morton (2011), point towards an overarching shift towards socially rooted motivations for home-education.

However, the differences between earlier and later categorisations could instead reflect the motives of families who have been cherry-picked for 'research' at distinct points in their home-education trajectory. Evidently, Rothermel's (2011) 'change of stance' means that any scheme or categorisations should be subject to continual development so as to account for the fluid nature of home-education itself. As mentioned earlier, considering social groups not previously depicted in education research might yield a more meaningful picture in this area.

2.6   Educating learners at 'home'

In this section, I discuss research around home-education practices. In particular, I review material on parent/child relations, educational styles, resources used and the learning and social activities observed in families.

2.6.1 Philosophies and approaches

The ways of 'doing home-education' are said to be as diverse and unique as home-educators themselves (see Rothermel 2011). What has usually been documented within the literature is that what home-education ultimately looks like is in some way connected to the motives, rationales and purposes of home-education. For example, Thomas (1998) notes that parents (typically those who have removed their children from school) often attempt to 'emulate school at home', usually by following a formal model of education, e.g. applying a curriculum, scheduling a timetable, etc., within a structured framework. Over time, Thomas (1998) suggests that this gradually evolves into a more unstructured approach of child-centred or child-directed forms of practice (usually after a period of 'deschooling'[11]) (Meighan 1995). Additionally, Thomas (1998) argues that the transition from structured to unstructured practice is motivated by the interests of the child: "most parents might not have departed from the security of structured learning if they had not been influenced by their children" (Thomas 1998, p.58).

Crucially, it is reported that autonomous styles of home-education share links with Meighan's notion of 'personalised learning' (Meighan 1995; 2007), whereby children apparently learn best when they are self-motivated and free to pursue whatever it is that they wish to learn. On an everyday level, this suggests that educational tasks are centred on the child and/or independently directed by the interests and actions of that child. 'Autonomous', 'unstructured', 'child-led' and 'natural' approaches to home-education lend themselves towards an informal learning process whereby children learn from 'everyday life'. For example, a child may learn mathematics in the shopping centre or the car. In his recent research with 30 home-educators, Kraftl (2013;2014) extended the notions of 'home' and 'school' regarding physical, social and co-constructed 'learning spaces' that are managed and redefined by families who home-educate. He further suggests that little research exists in this area, and more specifically research considering the types of learning that take place within these spaces.

Informal learning processes do not follow a clear trajectory or structure and instead are said to emerge through 'opportunity' (Thomas and Pattison 2008). Subsequently, the processes associated with informal learning often do not produce a tangible written outcome, thus making it difficult to trace or measure (Thomas and Pattison 2008). A lack of traceability is inherently at odds with the ways of learning associated with more formal and structured approaches to learning, which typically happen in institutional settings such as workplaces or schools. At a time when 'learning' is

---

[11] Broadly, 'deschooling' refers to the period when a child 'gets the school out of them' shortly after being withdrawn from school. The length of the 'deschooling' process is dependent on the total number of years spent in school beforehand (Meighan, 1995).

synonymous with the traceability of formal educational outcomes, informal learning processes challenge assumptions about what constitutes learning itself. Based on their extensive research on informal learning in home-education, Thomas and Pattison (2013) challenge the idea that learning is a definable and deliverable activity. Crucially, they argue that the approaches described and observed in home-education share similarities with educational philosophy and experiential learning theory. Autonomous education, or 'learner-managed learning' (Fortune-Wood 2005, p.1), originates from different strands of constructivism, behaviourism and cognitivist theories of learning:

> Autonomy is the right of self-government and free will … Autonomous education is simply the process by which knowledge grows because of the intrinsic motivation of the individual … the core to understanding autonomous education is understanding the absolutely unshakable role of intrinsic motivation. (Fortune-Wood 2000, p.26)

In other words, self-motivation and free will are reported to be central to more effective, meaningful and creative learning, as opposed to 'extrinsic' motivations, e.g. being forced to study something by a teacher (Fortune-Wood 2000, pp.27–28). Within autonomous approaches, the role assumed by home-educators is described as that of a 'co-learner', 'facilitator' and/or 'guide', each suggesting varying levels of educational influence and learner autonomy (Harding 2011). Within each of these approaches, home-educating families are said to utilise a range of resources for their home-education, including library books, worksheets, museum trips, and classes provided by neighbourhood groups, for example (Safran 2008). In Section 2.6.2, I critically discuss the assumption that home-education pedagogies offer learners more 'freedom'.

While authors suggest that home-educating practices are inherently diverse and variable, anecdotal evidence suggests that home-educators in the UK lean towards informal, not- timetabled and autonomous approaches to education (Thomas and Pattison 2008). For example, in his research conducted with 277 home-educated families, Fortune-Wood (2005, p.57) found that 16 families identified their practice as 'structured', 17 as 'flexible/structured', 116 as 'flexible', 33 as 'flexible/autonomous', 73 as 'autonomous' and 22 as 'other'. However, the variability in what 'flexibility' and 'structure' mean to different home-educators suggests that practices are likely to differ further within each of these self-identified categories. However, in his review of *Home-education: then and now*, Davies (2015) argues that

> [t]he bias in EHE towards more autonomous forms of learning may not say so much about the 'naturalness' of such approaches, about the characteristics of families who can, and choose to, home-educate. (p.546)

Consequently, Davies (2015) asserts that researchers of home-education need to focus more explicitly on the broader "approaches to family life and the kinds of relationships between family members rather than educational approaches alone" (p.546).

More recently, Yusof (2015) has grouped home-educating families into three types. The first two were a) a structured family, which made extensive use of curricula and textbooks, in which learning took place at regular intervals during the week (p.47); and b) an informal family, which had an 'autonomous' and entirely child-led approach. Yusof found that the second kind of family "held the belief that the children were the best judge of what is to be learned and how it should be learned … many taught their children mathematics if their children requested help with a concept" (p.50). In contrast, Yusof classified the third type of family (2015) as a semi-formal family. This was a family where

> the child had a significant influence on their learning – they could determine the learning resources used and the amount of time spent learning. The parents acted as a mentor, suggesting areas of improvement, facilitating learning and perhaps initiating change if the current learning approach was judged unsuccessful. (Yusof 2015, p.52)

However, the difficulty with Yusof's (2015) classification of families is that autonomous approaches could be likened, Bernstein might argue, to a form of pedagogy where the child has greater control over the sequence and pace of learning (see Bernstein 1975: *Class and pedagogies: visible and invisible*). Thus, the framing of such an approach is weak. However, it is possible for a family to assume an autonomous yet also formal approach to the teaching/learning of mathematics (or any other subject, for that matter). At the heart of this is the tension between supposed freedom and control, which Yusof alluded to in her account of parent and learner relations. I think this is an area that could benefit from a more nuanced analysis of pedagogy, with a focus on the classification and framing of different approaches.

The tensions surrounding the suggested biases concerning autonomous styles are often laced with either positive or negative sentiment; for example, Fortune-Wood's (2005) account of autonomous home-education frames it as a pathway towards a 'freer education'.

Moreover, writers such as Webb (2010) argue that autonomous approaches possess a 'faulty logic'. He claims that it does not follow that a child who learns to walk will 'naturally', through osmosis, learn to read and write in the same way (Webb 2010).

Considering these contributions and topical issues, there is arguably a need for a more objective and broader reading of the educational approaches used in home-education: specifically, a reading that moves away from equating value judgements with undisputed evidence of their effectiveness. I discuss the influence of partisanship and implications for methodology in home-education research in the following sections. However, one can begin to see some of the effects of this surfacing within existing literature on how home-education should be achieved.

2.6.2 Parent/child relations

Parent/child relations is a contested area in home-education research. First, discussions centre on 'facilitator' parental roles that supposedly yield greater freedom to learners. A related issue in this area is whether the inseparable parent/child and educator/learner role is one that prohibits children from acquiring interests and values that differ from those held by their parents.

First, the lion's share of home-education is typically undertaken by the mother (Meighan 1995; Safran 2008; Web 1990). Further, within his sample of 58 home-educating families in Australia and 42 in England, Meighan (1997, p.7) found that few shared the task of home-education, while only two males took primary responsibility for it. The implied prominence of the 'mother' figure educating at home, while fathers assume the primary economic responsibility of 'breadwinner', depicts home-education as a modern as opposed to a 'postmodern' free alternative (Apple 2006). Several scholars have subsequently researched the implications of what they see as an inherently gendered movement (particularly in the US) (see Apple 2000; 2006; Kunzman and Gaither 2013).

Based on her doctoral research involving 28 home-educating families, Yusof (2015) deployed a child and parent questionnaire to explore the connection between parental beliefs (influential in the educational approach chosen by families) and the beliefs and attitudes of children that are relevant to their perceptions of mathematics. In this respect, she sought to extend the work of Rothermel (2002) and Rudner (1996) by focusing on the effect of the environment within which learning took place.

Normative questions surrounding the degree of personal autonomy home-educated children have in developing their social norms and behaviour is also an area that is debated in the literature (see Kunzman and Gaither 2013). For example, Medlin (2000) challenges the perceived assumption that home-educated children come to assume the philosophies of their parents and thus have little chance to develop their social views. However, overall, the empirical research into value formation is unclear (Kunzman and Gaither 2013, p.22). For example, scholars such as Reich (2002; 2008) express concerns over the extent to which home-educated learners have the options and capacity to distinguish their values from those of their parents. Blokhuis (2010), West (2009) and Woodhouse (2002) expressed concern that some forms of home-education may limit the capacity for developing this autonomy and instead serve to restrict them from adopting a range of perspectives and values. The role and suitability of the state in fostering this autonomy is debated (see Conroy 2010; Kunzman 2012).

In her paper: *Home-education and the power of trust*, the independent scholar Safran (2012) draws on her own experiences of home-educating report a widespread phenomenon whereby parents are

putting trust in their children. Safran (2012) argues that adopting autonomous and/or child-centred learning styles in home-education signals the handing over of responsibility and, by implication, greater freedom to learners. The implication here is that educational styles such as these offer greater agency than a school system that does not fully trust children to be independent learners. It is an interesting idea that requires empirical substantiation and critical analysis.

2.6.3 Educational and social activities

One of the now-outdated assumptions about home-education is that children who are home-educated have little opportunity to socialise outside the family (Burke 2007). It follows that, as adults, they come to lack the vital social skills to successfully function as 'normal' members of the wider society they are part of (Webb 1999). These assumptions are rooted in further assumptions about the practice of home-education itself; namely, that home-educating families rarely leave the house and that, without the socialising agent of school, it is impossible for children to be 'fully' socialised. Kunzman and Gaither (2013) suggest that these assumptions, which derive from popular media, hold little truth in reality. Numerous research studies have reported findings to the contrary; for example, home-educated children are said to be 'well-adjusted' and confident, and even, some suggest, more so than their school counterparts (Webb 1990; Meighan 1995).

Medlin (2000) argues that researchers should instead consider asking "do home-educated children participate in the daily routines of their communities? Are they acquiring the rules of behaviour and systems of beliefs and attitudes they need? Can they function effectively as members of society?" (p.76). Medlin (2013) concludes that while research suggests that home-educated children are happy, responsible and confident children, who have deeper and more meaningful relationships with friends and adults, "what home-educated children think of their social skills is less clear" (Medlin 2013, p.284). Although still broadly positive about home-education, several studies found that home-educated children occasionally feel a greater sense of isolation and were 'less peer oriented' than their schooled counterparts (see Delahooke 1986; Seo 2009; Shirkey 1987, cited in Kunzman and Gaither 2013, p.21)

Scholars conceptualise socialisation as 'interaction' – they are predominantly concerned with assessing the social skills of home-educated children through "a variety of methods" (Kunzman and Gaither 2013, p.19). Much of this is focused on drawing comparisons with their schooled counterparts. Many of the empirical studies are flawed in their sampling and methods (usually based on self-report questionnaires), and/or use problematic measurement tools for assessing 'loneliness', etc. (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). Very few studies consider how and in what ways home-educated children socialise on an 'everyday' level.

Notably, the review by Kunzman and Gaither (2013, pp.19-20) of 351 international texts written in the English language on home-education highlighted a number of important themes on the topic. First, they noted the tendency for researchers to evaluate home-educated children's social skills through numerous tests and methods, e.g. the Social Skills Rating System. On the basis of this, home-educated children were inferred to subsequently possess 'better' social skills for navigating wider society than those of their schooled counterparts, and this was evident across a range of activities, e.g. extracurricular sports. However, Kunzman and Gaither (2013) also observed that several studies reporting on socialisation relied almost entirely on self-reported questionnaires and/or accounts given by parents. Thus, they argued, the findings reflected the opinions of home-education advocates as opposed to the evidence generated from robust research. Moreover, home-educated children were commonly suggested to have social contact with a broad range of age groups. As a result of this, some have suggested that home-educated children are more likely to 'successfully' integrate within social institutions later in life, e.g. colleges and workplaces (Kunzman and Gaither 2013).

The 'family' unit is typically cited as rich, intimate and a fundamental agent of socialisation for home-educated children. Socialisation itself is depicted as synonymous with 'values formation'. This usually encompasses normative questions surrounding not only how home-educated children socialise, but also the values that they form in consequence. Debates in this area are closely connected to questions of whether home-educated children have social autonomy. Consequently, Kunzman and Gaither (2013) conclude that few empirical studies offer a 'balanced' view of socialisation and the formation of values.

As an example, within the UK and US contexts, both Thomas (1998) and Mecham (2004) suggest that home-educating parents are often acutely aware of the importance of social experiences for their children. Subsequently, they actively seek out social opportunities by organising educational activities and meeting with other home-educating families in local groups (Thomas 1998). As Thomas (1998) describes, "there now exist many flourishing groups of home-educating families who meet on a regular basis … however, the stage has not yet been reached where they are dotted around the neighbourhood" (Thomas 1998, p.113). More recently, in her research Safran (2008) has suggested that the prevalence of neighbourhood home-educating groups offer social and learning opportunities that home-educators perceived to be part of their practice.

In a US study involving interviews with 250 'home-schooling' families, Hanna (2011) found that home-educating parents often knew of other home-educating families, with whom they worked to deliver educational and social activities for their children. Joint activities reported were 1) one parent

with expertise acting as an instructor for a group of children; 2) home-educators sharing resources, i.e. books; 3) parents collectively making use of 'private school' facilities such as science labs, computer labs and equipment; 4) religiously oriented groups of parents sharing curricula and organising specialist visits and programmes; and 5) parents joining YMCA facilities for physical education and socialising opportunities with other home-schooling families (Hanna 2011, cited in Nelson 2013, pp.165–166).[12]

The existing literature suggests that home-educating families positively value networking with one and another. For example, in his research with a small group of home-educating families in the US, Mecham (2004) found that although the family was perceived as the most important socialising 'agent' within their home-education practices, this was mentioned alongside other 'social contacts' for their children, including "community organisations, sports programmes, and the internet" (Mecham 2004, cited in Medlin 2013, p.286).

If home-education is indeed happening in the nexus of the 'family', 'communities' and 'networks', perhaps the *institutional* setting of home-education practice might have changed in some way. In his analysis of the history of domestic pedagogies, Davies (2015) provides an interesting commentary.[13]

Clearly, exploration of both the organisational features and impact of online networks amidst some of the pre-existing offline communities thought to exist in home-education is a meaningful area for future research.

In her doctoral research, Nelson (2013), too, found that home-education groups played a major role in home-education. She explains that the groups

> For many parents, online organisations (e.g. Education Otherwise; Then UK) and local EHE groups (e.g. HELM) were the first port of call for EHE information and advice. The advice offered centred on legal issues and dealing with LAs. Also, many parents found virtual support networks established by local groups in their area helpful, primarily because

---

[12] Hanna's 2011 paper was updated on 08/01/2012. The most recent version can be found here: http://eus.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/05/10/0013124511404886

[13] Davies (2015) remarks that: "[t]he school is a distinctively an *educational institution*, by which I mean that although it does more than educate, its raison d'être is educational. The *family* is not a distinctively educational institution, but rather defined in part by a commitment to the upbringing of children. One element of upbringing is education, so the family is an institution in which education is a necessary feature, but only periodically central, and more often a 'by-product' of everyday family life. We can read the concerns with both the family and school in two ways. The first is a concern with the educational value of the *practices* in which children are engaging, and the second is with the *institutional* setting of such practices" (pp.543-544).

they acted as a point of contact and helped to facilitate communication and extended opportunities to socialise with other families (p.165).

However, because Nelson (2013) used these groups to recruit her sample, she cautions against the premature assumption that all home-educators make use of groups and similar organisations intended to support home-education.

However, research on how home-educated families socialise has tended to define social opportunities solely as those involving face-to-face interaction. Literature has also focused on the social networks formed among home-educators rather than home-educated children. Very few inquiries have encompassed how home-educated families socialise with respect to the role of internet technologies, nor have they considered what this may mean in theorising the relationship between communities and networks in home-education. As will be shown in Section 2.8, the few US studies that have emerged on home-education and technologies suggest that this is an important area for further research.

2.6.4 Home-education groups

Previous research has shown that networking and collaboration of families for both social and educational purposes are processes that occur in home-education practice (Nelson 2013). The most significant contributions in this area come from Stevens (2001) and Safran (2008).

A theme within the field of home-education groups and communities is whether the practice of home-education epitomises the rejection of 'community' versus home-education as the re-establishment of community in the midst of the loss of community in wider society. Kunzman and Gaither (2013) note the prevalence of home-education advocates pointing to the positive social influences of participating in home-educating groups. They suggest that these groups offer valuable opportunities for home-educated children to interact socially, "but with less of the negative social influences associated with traditional schooling, such as peer pressure and bullying" (p.19). They suggest that many of the debates on socialisation normatively decide what constitutes desirable socialisation, i.e. learning how to interact and navigating through the activities and norms of groups within broader society.

Pertinently, having spent nearly a decade interviewing home-schooling parents in the US, Stevens (2001) reveals that home-schooling "[i]s not a random collection of individuals but an elaborate social movement with its celebrities, networks, and characteristic lifeways" (p.10). Interestingly, he found that local home-education communities were sometimes hostile to home-educators with different or opposing philosophical and ideological approaches to their practice. This conflict centred on supposedly 'authentic' versus 'fake' home-educators. Stevens (2001) explains that the

sensibilities by which home-educators most strongly differentiate themselves from one another are 'autonomous' versus 'structured' educational styles. Stevens (2001) showed that this was a product of working towards inherently different goals. Evidently, exploring the ways in which home-educators perceive themselves as similar or distinct from one and another is an area that would benefit from further research.

While Stevens' work illuminates the basis upon which home-educators differentiated themselves and establish their social ties, Safran's (2008) work used communities of practice theory to describe the nature of 'neighbourhood groups' themselves. Based on her doctoral research exploring neighbourhood home-education groups among 'experienced home-educators', Safran (2008) applied Wenger's (1998) original Communities of Practice framework (CoP) to conceptualise the learning processes and structures within home-education communities who meet regularly offline. The CoP models originates from Lave's and Wenger's (1996) earlier work on situated learning. Crucially, through participating in this form of social group, members acquire a shared sense of belonging and identity. Using this framework to explore home-education groups, Safran (2008) asserts that

> The neighbourhood home-education group is an unusual community of practice … it is not an institution such as an office, hospital or school with generally well-known structures. In the neighbourhood home-education group, there is no defined structure, no formal obligations, no agreed way to do things and their joint enterprise may not even be made explicit. (Safran 2008, p.3)

Further, Safran (2008) suggests, even when home-educators choose not to engage face to face with neighbourhood home-education groups, the process of reading newsletters, visiting websites and browsing email lists while home-educating engages indiviuals in a collective social and learning process that makes those individuals legitimate peripheral participants of the wider home-education culture (Safran 2010, p.1). Moreover, Nelson's (2013) findings not only to the active role of familial networks but also to the 'virtual' networks that local groups have established in addition to meeting face to face offline. However, it is not known how these two kinds of organisations coexist with one another. While Safran (2008) also hints at the potential for Yahoo! email lists to foster what Wenger (1998) conceptualised as 'constellations of practice', the substantive link between both kinds of groups and what this means for the conceptualisation of CoPs in home-education is unexplored. However, little is known about how the acquisition of additional domains of online communication (such as a Yahoo!) might have reconfigured the repertoires (ways of doing), activities and relations between members.

Moreover, the landscape of Communities of Practice has itself evolved to account for more informal social groups in addition to the dynamic spaces within which members participate. Variants include 'co-located CoP ', 'electronic networks of practice' and 'knowledge networks' (see Brown and Duguid 2000). Evidently, little is known about if or how the relations between home-educators who participate in the kinds of offline neighbourhood groups identified by Safran (2008) might have shaped, or been shaped by, the acquistion of new technologies. This is not to imply a deterministic assumption about the role of new technologies within home-education communites; rather, I am suggesting that it would be worthwhile to consider how communities shape, and in the process might be shaped by, the acquisition of modes of communiciation and networked sociality afforded through online networks.

2.7 Outcomes

Internationally, the academic attainment of home-educated children in comparison to their mainstream-schooled counterparts is also a strong area of research. For some of the largest-scale studies from 1990–2010, see Ray (1997;1999; 2010). Other small-scale studies carried out in the 1980s (in the US) include Frost and Morris (1988); Ray and Waters (1991); Rudner (1999); Belfield (2004) and Quaqish (2007). According to Kunzman and Gaither (2013), one of the major assumptions to emerge from the literature is that home-educated children often outperform their schooled counterparts in standardised tests. However, the extent to which home-education is an influential factor in comparison to other factors such as family background is unclear (Kunzman and Gaither 2013). Nevertheless, home-education advocates such as Webb (see Webb 1990; 1999), have uncritically assumed the former to be the case.

In her research using a questionnaire survey (completed by 419 home-educating families in the UK) and using 196 PIPS Baseline Assessments, Rothermel (2004, p.1) found that "64% of the home-educated reception-aged (4–5 years old) children scored over 75% on their PIPS Baseline Assessments as opposed to 5.1% of children nationally". Home-educated children also scored higher in their National Literacy Project assessment, scoring within the 'top band' of achievement. Based on the results from the 'psychosocial instruments' of the study, Rothermel also confirms that "home-educated children were socially adept without behavioural problems and demonstrated high levels of attainment and good social skills" (Rothermel 2004). However, Rothermel's (2004) findings are limited in two respects. First, her sample was accessed over a two-year period through informal networking via conversations with home-educating families, observations of home-educators at local and national meetings, and interviews with Local Authorities. Secondly, the questionnaire and

assessment aspect of the study was 'self-completed'. Thus, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the children, without the input of parents, completed the assessments.

Much of the research on home-education in the US, for example, has focused on 'hard outcomes' in home-education. A big component of this includes comparing homeschooled children's attainment with that of their schooled counterparts. For examples, see Delahooke (1986), Ray (2007), Rakeshaw (1987), Ray and Eagleson (2008), Rudner (1999) and Quaqish (2007).

Moreover, Yusof (2015) identified a number of key differences in children's perceptions of mathematics that corresponded with the educational approach taken. Interestingly, in both formal and non-formal families, children had similar levels of mathematical understanding, as measured by speed of calculation, confidence and application. The child in formal families felt that maths was a boring subject. Interestingly, Yusof found that the child's perceptions of mathematics was closely aligned to the parental attitude of the mother. Yusof concludes that it is important to acknowledge the diversity of approaches "when determining the effects of home-education on children's learning" (p.55).

Based on initial research with 100 home-educating families in Australia and on their later work, Thomas and Pattison (2007) explored the impact of learning to read informally (without timescales; incidental, implicit and self-directed learning, etc.). They found no adverse effects on the acquisition of literacy skills in learners who would typically be deemed 'later learners' (over seven years). The findings of their research provide what Thomas and Pattison (2015) argue is evidence to question structured and staged learning programmes:

> Our findings suggest that it is feasible for children to become literate simply through cultural immersion in a literate society. In this type of learning, formal instruction is replaced by everyday experience in a culture where literacy is embedded everywhere. (p.73)

Arguably, this relies to some degree on the literacy skills of parents, and in some cases literacy among Gypsy and Traveller parents who home-educate was cited to be an issue among these types of home-educating families (see Fensham-Smith 2014).

The outcomes of home-education are said to be holistic in that it affects all spheres of family life, including the identities of both parents and learners. Home-education is thus a holistic transformation far beyond conventional educational achievement. For example, based on her doctoral research, in which she interviewed 34 'experienced' home-educators (home-educating for three years or more), Safran (2008) explored the impact of home-educating across several spheres of family life: financial circumstances, career and work, parents' personal interests and 'time' for themselves (parents). The home-educators in Safran's research reported mixed attitudes,

particularly in relation to the 'career' and financial impacts of home-educating. Interestingly, in the realm of parental personal interests, Safran suggests that the personal interests of her interviewees were cultivated and extended through home-education. For some parents, their personal interests became more closely aligned with those of their children and they were therefore fulfilled, while for others this was not the case. Home-educators exhibit a variety of attitudes "towards finance, career, time for themselves and personal interests and they used different methods to handle the problems they faced" (p.28). She concludes that we should be cautious in assuming that these areas are automatically problematic for parents and families. Safran's work alludes to the closer alignment between the personal interests of parent and child. While she notes this was not always the case, her findings tap into what could be seen as the product of an increased level of family intimacy as a result of home-education. How this affects the future interests and personal ambitions of learners and parents in the long term is an area for further research.

Moreover, in their qualitative research with 30 home-educating mothers (27 married and secular), Neuman and Guterman (2016) found that home-educators "do not perceive the goals of educational attainment" as primary indicators of future success. In his research, Thomas (1998) found that the majority of home-educators reported that their children were developing socially 'normally'. He noted the perception of what home-educators suggested was a much rounder social development for their children, whereby their children often mixed with children and adults of all ages. This was further characterised by social precocity, as children felt confident and expressed a high level of self-assurance (Thomas 1998, p.115). Further, Webb's (1999) research found that young people who were home-educated were "more mature, emotionally and socially, than their school contemporaries" (p.58).

Home-education outcomes, Medlin (2000) argues, are an expression of goals that have been achieved as the result of the home-education experience. In other words, rather than outcomes such as the acquisition of numeracy and/or literacy skills, the accounts of these mothers were arranged around three key attributes connected to socially related aspects: egalitarian attitudes without prejudice, a high standard of communication and selective relationships. The authors argue that these characteristics are in keeping with a social constructivist pedagogical approach (Medlin 2000).

2.8   New technologies: the missing link?

The proliferation of internet technologies is widely cited as sharing a connection to the rise of home-education by authors writing from an international perspective (see Kunzman and Gaither 2013). However, the place, use and purpose of internet technologies, and more specifically online

networks, for home-education is a significantly under-researched area within the literature. Where authors have identified internet technologies as playing an important role, for example in making home-education 'easier', few have systematically researched how they do so (see Webb 1999; Apple 2011). As will be shown, the few studies that exist in this area have only considered partial aspects of the place and purpose of internet technologies among small segments of home-educating populations, mainly within the US. All are based on small case studies and/or have not researched the role of online technologies for home-education within the context of the diverse range of online media technologies used today.

When this study began in 2012, a multitude of online technologies were being used by billions of people across the globe to interact and collaborate with other individuals and groups. The process of interacting via these online technologies and the new structures built between groups (known as 'online networks') presents an important and 'prominent socialising agent' of the digital age (Liang et al. 2012). Online social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, blogs, Skype and YouTube, for example, "display, in general, a rich internal structure where users can choose among different types and intensity of interactions" (Grabowicz et al. 2012, p.1). Online and offline networking are paralleled and foster a combination of strong/weak ties that are built and maintained in both virtual and offline contexts. Within these networked connections, a few individuals act as 'key brokers', maintaining connections between individuals and thus strengthening what Grabowicz et al. (2012) call 'intermediary ties'.

Online networks also foster collaborative learning and reasoning through the co-creation of knowledge-producing communities (Bielaczyc and Collins 2006).[14] In this way, participating in online forums, for example, promotes the sharing of knowledge and learning among a collective of users (Linn and Slotta 2006). Other 'online networks', such as those unique to online computer-based simulation gaming, for example, promote what Liang et al. (2012) found to be 'collaborative discovery'. 'Blogging', for example, facilitates collaboration and argumentation through the process of interactive web pages and comments (Wiley and Bailey 2012).

Notably, the formal and informal structures within online networks themselves present opportunities for geographically dispersed learners to come together, make decisions, discuss, share advice and support each other within a single online space. This is facilitated by the asynchronous and real-time forms of communication that the online technologies offer (Kingler 2005). Further, through the

---

[14] Liang et al., (2012) suggest that these otherwise heterogeneous communities are interwoven and work in co-operation through a process of 'hybrid social networking' (p.1).

process of online networking, users can create a sense of community and exchange meaningful dialogue, which can contribute to what Klinger (2005) suggests is a 'deliberative democracy'.

For example, in her empirical research Dillon (2012) found online networks to be an important medium whereby individuals were able to narrate a dialogical self, offering cultural relevance and personal empowerment to young people. In this way, online networks can also be important spaces for promoting social inclusion (Notely 2009). For example, in her qualitative research with 12 'gifted' young people, Dillon (2012) found that online networks, such as those built across email lists, can be used as space for teens to address developmental issues and offer a means for intimacy and connection with others (Dillon 2012). On the other hand, as recent media articles have reported, online networks that encourage types of 'faceless' communication, such as ASKfm, may also place young people at increased risk of cyber-bullying and harm in both online and offline contexts (Reich et al. 2012). Despite extensive empirical and theoretical research into contemporary online networks, their place, use and purpose in contemporary home-education in England, Wales and Scotland is unclear.

In his qualitative PhD research entitled: *The role of technology in the rise of home-schooling in the US*, Andrade (2008) sought to explore the relationship and purpose between the diffusion of computer-mediated technologies and the suggested growth of home-schooling in the US. His sample was limited in that it only included home-educators who predominantly identified with the 'stereotype' of home-educators in the US (i.e. white, religious and middle class). On the basis of 27 interviews with families and focus groups, Andrade (2008) found that computer-mediated technologies (including 'the web, forums and email lists') observed following links in interent use and the rise of home-education:

- The decision to home-educate: the use of computer-mediated technologies helped to "lower informal, interpersonal, instructional and psychological barriers of entry during the process of deliberation leading up to the decision to Homeschool" (p.3).

- Online technologies helped to create, access and sustain Communities of Practice (CoPs) for home-educating families

- Online technologies were also found to help participants "energize latent or percolating ideologies of choice, individualism and parental sovereignty" (p.4).

Andrade (2008) also found that participants' uses of online technologies were somewhat latent within their accounts unless explicitly mentioned. However, it is unclear if this was more a product of the limitations of the data collection methods and techniques that Andrade used than of

participants' implicit attitudes to online technologies. Andrade's (2008) findings highlighted the fact that computer and communication technologies had helped parents lower informal, interpersonal, instructional and psychological barriers of 'entry' during the process of deliberation leading to the decision to home-educate. Once parents were committed to home-schooling, online technologies helped them to create, access and sustain 'Communities of Practice' (Lave and Wegner 1991).

Furthermore, Apple (2011) suggests that technologies such as the internet, TV and radio are being used by a "powerful group of educational activists – conservative Christian Evangelical homeschoolers" (p.113) – to grow and support themselves through a variety of ideologically motivated social agendas. Apple (2011) argues that these technologies provide individuals with a way of personalising information so as to only select specialised knowledge by choosing "what they want to know or what they find personally interesting" (Apple 2011, p.9). Further, Apple argues that unless we are extremely cautious, "customizing our lives" in this way could radically undermine the strength of local communities, many of which are already woefully weak (Apple 2011, p.9). This argument suggests that the role of online technologies for home-education paradoxically perpetuates forms of social solidarity and disintegration.

Apple's (2011) conceptualisation of 'community' is limited in that it relies upon and prioritises offline interaction. In the same way that online technologies may weaken and undermine the strength of local communities, Apple's theorisations fail to describe how the spaces created using these technologies could be conceived of as local communities in and of themselves and in this way be used to create, strengthen (and weaken) both online and offline social structures. Notably, Apple's theorisations are also limited in that they are not grounded in empirical findings. Equally, for reasons discussed in earlier sections, the extent to which direct applications can be made from Apple's theorisation to home-education in England and Wales is limited.

Little is known about how online networks may be connected to, or embedded within, the everyday practices of home-education in both online and/or offline contexts. The few empirical studies to explore online technologies and home-education in some capacity focus on home-education in the US. The findings to emerge from these studies are further limited in that they are typically based on small-scale research and/or only a handful of cases.

For example, in her master's thesis, *Unschooling media: participatory practices among progressive homeschoolers*, Bertozzi (2006) examined "the attitudes, beliefs and practices related to media and technology in the unschooling subculture" (p.5), which she suggests has primarily grown as a movement alongside the evolution of grassroots media technologies. Bertozzi (2006) found the attitudes and practices relating to technologies to be variable within different unschooling practices.

She argued that their use supports the pusuit of an alternative 'utopian ideal'. This would imply that for Bertozzi's participants, online media technologies played an enabling role, cohesive with the ideologies of 'unschooling' – a specific perspective on home-education (see previous sections).

Based on five case studies investigating home-educators in the US, Bertozzi [15] (2006) found that 'unschoolers' use media and technologies to engage in what she theorises as 'participatory practices':

> They play active roles in creating meaning through media and technology … the participatory nature of these practices such as finding/reading/consuming texts, social/experiential learning, building/using social networks, radical linguistic interactions and producing/contemplating media artefacts generates meaning for unschoolers on both personal and cultural levels … which contributes to the collective generation of subcultural identity over time. (Bertozzi 2006, p.3)

Further, Bertozzi (2006) argues that media practices often support, reinforce and contradict each other over time, "revealing a subculture in the dynamic process of defining self" (Bertozzi 2006, p.3). More specifically, she notes tensions within the unschooling philosophy regarding 'real versus computer-mediated' interaction and 'natural versus media-oriented' educational tasks.

The use of technologies (both online/internet and media-based technologies) may also feature within everyday practices families who adopted a structured approach to home-education. For example, as part of her doctoral research, with four 'home-schooling' families and seven administrators and counsellors within the district of Southeast Ohio, US, Bullock (2011) found varying attitudes and uses of technologies among homeschoolers.[16] One family used technology as part of delivering a school curriculum format, while others used the internet to access various educational resources, including computer software. However, she suggests that further research needs to be undertaken that compares uses in rural, urban and/or suburban contexts.

Online technologies also feature within the sourcing and delivering of everyday learning practices among home-educating families. For example, in her longitudinal study of 250 home-educating families in urban, rural and suburban areas of Pennsylvania, US, between 1998 and 2008, Hanna (2012) noted a 50–60% increase in the number of families using online programmes and offline networking with other home-educators to pool ideas and share educational resources. However, since 2008 there have been significant technological developments in online learning programmes, including the increased availability of multiuser virtual learning platforms such as Coursera, for example (see www.coursera.org).

---

[15] Bertozzi (2006) used a combination of interviews and an analysis of media artefacts to construct her case studies.
[16] Bullock's (2011) research was a collective case study comprised of questionnaires and interviews.

Further, from the findings from survey emails and face-to-face interviews with 16 US home-educating families as part of an action research design, Lina (2011) found that home-educators primarily used online technologies (such as search engines and email lists) to prepare content for 'lessons'. She also concluded that home-educators preferred face-to-face 'instruction' over the use of technology for their practice.

In her content analysis of 25 blog entries from September 2006 to September 2007, incorporating 28 US homeschoolers (University of North Dakota), Tollefson (2007) found home-educators used blogs to share resources, advice and stories. This included organising social activties and to discuss their teaching techniques. She concluded that 'homeschoolers' do not use blogs in a traditional sense, i.e. as an online journal, and instead used it as an interactive resource to communicate with others and for combating social isolation (Tollefson 2007, p.234). Although Tollefson's (2007) work is useful in illuminating some of the positive social outcomes associated with online blogging, her study illuminates the need to establish what such interactions mean for how home-education is represented as a practice, particularly in the case of media artefacts depicting the contrary (Hauseman 2011).

To the best of my knowledge, no study has comprehensively explored the role of new technologies, online networks and communities among parents and learners and whether home-education has changed consequently. When this doctorate began in September 2012, the prominence of online networks for home-education was visible across hundreds of forums, websites, blogs, email lists and Facebook groups set up for home-education. The little that is known about home-education and the role of online networks has emerged from research undertaken at the time of the Badman Review in 2009.

The use of social networking in home-education at the time of the Badman Review was also mentioned by Webb (2010) in his book *Elective home-education in the UK*. According to Webb (2010, p.38), home-educators used two major websites (Education Otherwise and Home-education UK) alongside an emailing list to respond to and coordinate and deliver a campaign against the recommendations made by Graham Badman (2009). Webb (2010) explains:

> The more militant autonomous educators are well organised and give the impression of being more numerous than they are. A core of activists patrols the internet looking for debates about home-education taking place online. Should a newspaper or magazine run a piece on home-education and it is possible to post comments online, the comments section will at once be flooded with pro-home-education posts … Anybody who is critical will be challenged. (Webb 2010, p.39)

Webb (2010) goes on to argue that there are a small minority of home-educators who see themselves as the 'shock troops' of home-education – activists fighting for all home-educators – and who waged a 'vicious' campaign against Graham Badman over the internet (p.39). Webb (2010) describes how these online communities were used by a minority of home-educators to perpetuate their personal agendas and socially exclude 'outsiders'. He also implies that the wider home-educating community has yet to organise themselves and 'to create bridges across incommensurability', a result of mistrust that has now led to their 'misfortune' (p.39).

Webb's (2010) observations resonate with Apple's (2006; 2011; 2015) earlier theorisations that home-education, alongside the use of online technologies, fosters a form of societal disintegration on some level. However, Webb's (2010) views seem to reflect his opinion as opposed to analysis grounded in a systematic empirical piece of research. His ideas appear to be oriented towards delivering his personal verdict on these online communities about the Badman report and are thus of limited use.

For example, as part of her doctoral work on the discovery of home-education, Lees (2011) mentions internet forums when describing how:

> [s]ubsequent to the *Badman Review*, many comments about home-educators feeling burnt out, bruised and exhausted were posted on EHE internet forums. There was also a great deal of anger throughout the Review period on the part of home-educators. (p.51)

Moreover, one of the leading scholars in the field, Harriet Pattison (2009), noted that extensive use was made of social networking sites to build and maintain contacts, distribute information and carry out a variety of actions. A Yahoo! group called the *Badman Review Action Group* was set up to act as a nationwide forum for news, comments and information sharing. Facebook groups like *Stop the UK Government Stigmatising Home-educators* (with over 2,000 members) and a number of blogs were used for networking and online communication.

> There is no doubt that the speed and ease of social networking and online communication was an important factor in the successful organisation and communication and probably worked to keep more people better informed than any other conceivable form of communication could have achieved. (Pattison 2009, pp.8–9)

At the same time, Pattison (2009) suggests that Badman and his family had been threatened using social media and that this had thwarted the efforts of some home-educators to successfully access freedom of information requests. She notes that "the identity and truthfulness of those participating in online communication cannot ever be guaranteed, even in member-only forums, and this acts as both a risk and protection factor" (Pattison 2009, p.9).

The increased availability and creation of online and offline communities may have implications for several aspects of UK home-education. For example, in her doctoral work, Lees (2011) describes the connection between online networks and the discovery of home-education:

> "[T]here is no doubt that internet usage and the discovery of EHE have a relationship. This relationship is considered as a combination of a lack of active EHE-appropriate (i.e. not disappointing in its legal, philosophical or educational accuracy) information provision by Government and a new social trend towards people 'doing it for themselves'.

Since undertaking empirical work for this study, McAvoy (2015) has asserted that new technologies have already impacted on home-education communities in a significant and irreversible way (p.82). Technologies, he argues, facilitate a more learner-centred curriculum. Thus, expanding access is likely to have a positive impact on home-educated learners. In this way, McAvoy (2015) posits that subsequently the home-education community are now "legitimate contributors to a process that is enjoying refreshingly democratic renaissance" (p.82).

McAvoy cites several of the studies that I have already discussed in Section 2.8 to support his ideas (e.g. Andrade 2008). However, his remarks below epitomise why research in this area is needed:

> [T]he relatively contemporary nature of this field of research does restrict the abilities of researchers to accurately scan the horizon for upcoming changes and shifts in how learning communities are evolving within a technological context. Extensive research in this area is warranted if we are to understand better how technology is influencing the relationship that home learners have with the curriculum. (McAvoy 2015, p.82)

Overall, the literature on new technologies in home-education that has been discussed clearly demonstrates the need for further work.

2.9   Observations on partisanship

In the following sections of this chapter, I present my observations on the partisanship that was discovered in home-education literature more broadly. Let me be clear – I am not supposing that all the empirical contributions and analyses on the topic have been influenced by the role of advocacy, because there are many exceptions. Rather, when undertaking this review, a wide range of materials on home-education, including autobiographies, newspapers and other online materials, in addition to scholarly work, were consulted. You only have to read the front covers of books written by researchers and other stakeholders in home-education to see 'whose side' an author is on. As examples:

The next learning system: and why home-schoolers are trailblazers (Meighan 1995)

Bound to be free: home-based education as a positive alternative to paying the hidden costs of 'free' education (Fortune-Wood 2001)

Alongside depictions of home-educators as pioneers travelling towards a notion of utopia in education (Pattison 2015) are those who hold competing views. For example, Webb, who home-educated his daughter, is a very well-known figure among home-education communities in the UK. In his published work on home-education, Webb (2010) asserts that children cannot simply be left to their own devices in order to successfully learn. Instead, they require some level of routine and/or scheduled activities. Webb wrote in his blog that during the 'Badman era' (2009–2010) he felt marginalised and ousted by what he calls 'militant' autonomous home-educators. I discuss the reactions to Badman further in Section 2.9.3. Nevertheless, what is apparent is that there are clear sides and divisions in home-education that have sometimes spilled over, not only into 'lay' or public discourse, but also into the styles and kinds of research undertaken on the topic.

I discussed Safran's (2012) claims on trust in home-education earlier, but what they show is the implicit paradox of home-education as both 'better' than and also 'different' from school (Pattison 2015). I discuss this observation further in Section 2.9.

Moreover, I would regard Lees (2013) as one of the more impartial and knowledgeable scholars of home-education, yet her work is not always immune from assumptions about the inherent 'goodness' of home-education. For example, she writes that

> [h]omes are more likely better able to offer and develop love than institutions … the love that can flow in EHE scenarios is an educational tool and an educational good, and renders EHE specialist regarding its ability to involve love in education and its outcomes. (Lees 2013, p.153)

The assumption that homes are able to develop love in a way that institutions cannot is misleading because it suggests that 'love', as an unmeasurable metric, is not only inherently important, but also supersedes the importance of attainment through qualifications. Suppose that, for example, a learner loved science but, due to funding limitations, had not gained the appropriate qualifications, and so was unable to study this at university because they did not have enough UCAS points to apply to their preferred course. That same learner might feel emotionally nurtured as result of home-education, but love in its broadest sense might not have been fully realised in the outcomes of their home-education. This is a hypothetical example, but my broader point is that many such ideas and assertions are put forward in a prevailing body of literature that is uncritical.

The reason that the contributions of writers, scholars, advocates and other stakeholders 'for' or 'against' are biased in relation to home-education stems from the traditionally unsupportive and inaccurate media coverage on home-education. As I show in the next section, home-education and

home-education communities are a marginalised group in the public eye, often subject to misrecognition (Fraser 1999).

2.9.1 The role of the media

In the fluid age of what Bauman (2000) calls 'liquid modernity', the media are prolific in producing images via film, television and newspapers. As mass producers of information, the media plays a pivotal role in the construction of knowledge, values, perceptions of history, institutions and power (Berry et al. 2010). With the shift towards 'media experts' being seen as the custodians of truth, the discursive signifiers fed to audiences are important in how we understand and construct our own perceptions of phenomena, which we then apply to the 'everyday' reality of our lives. These values tend to favour the social norms and expectations of the 'dominant culture' (Hauseman 2011). However, whether or not these representations are grounded in reality is often questionable.

In recent years, home-education has received increased visibility within the public sphere, with professionals, activists and the media (particularly around 2009–2010) disputing issues surrounding monitoring, safeguarding and regulation (see Stafford 2012). The ways the UK media represent home-education and what this means for how home-educators feel about how their practice is portrayed to the wider public is an area yet to be empirically researched. Notably, Lees (2013) argues that the *Badman Review* was likely to have increased the visibility of home-education, though perhaps not in a positive way.

In her analysis of five films and television programmes to feature "children being schooled in a non-traditional learning environment" in the US, Hauseman (2011, p.4) found several hidden 'messages' and 'assumptions' that she suggests are damaging and harmful to the portrayal of home-education and other forms of alternative learning. Their analysis revealed a single overarching archetype of home-educated children and adolescents portrayed as "nerdy know it all's" (p.6). Such young people were typically arrogant and deficient in social skills. Parents fell under the single archetype of the 'paranoid parent', who was a failure at "cultivating the necessary social skills to meet the needs of their children" (p.10). Within this depiction, home-educating parents were often overprotective and radical in their beliefs. Hauseman (2011) concluded that such portrayals are inauthentic and may be damaging and harmful to home-educating movements in North America and internationally.

Hauseman's (2011) findings are at odds with implications made by researchers that home-education has become more accepted in recent years (see Webb 2010). Pertinently, in her doctoral research on discovering 'elective home-education', Lees (2011) found that media portrayals of

home-education (particularly in the aftermath of Badman's 2009 review) told a story of persecution for home-educators who were depicted as threatening or as potential or actual abusers.

Although many authors writing about research on home-education, particularly in England, have shown that stereotypes of home-educators and home-educated children as 'hippies', 'New Age travellers', or 'sort of nerdy with an anorak' (Webb 1999) bear no resemblance to home-educating families and the practice of home-education in reality. Ensign (2000) suggests that stereotypes of home-education are applied to children with special educational needs who are currently home-educated, as they were to the broader home-educating population in the US during the 1980s. She argues that this is evidenced by the prominence of assumptions regarding whether parents are qualified to teach children with special needs and regarding issues of implied social isolation.

Coupled with a reported 'information deficit', Rothermel (2015) argues, home-education in the UK is still a somewhat dangerous notion in the public eye. However, sensationalistic media headlines are clearly not the only source of influence for shaping home-education perceptions in the public sphere. For example, blogs and social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook are now readily consumed in combination with traditional news media. It would be useful to explore this relationship and its impact in the discovery of home-education among parents, for example.

2.9.2 Advocacy and method

In her analysis, Pattison (2015) explores the relationship between home-education and schooling. She notes that home-education is conceptually subordinate to the dominant discourse of school. This relationship is difficult to reconcile. Pattison (2015) notes that "[p]ractitioners and other defenders frequently justify home-education by running an implicit or explicit comparison with school; a comparison which expresses the desire to do 'better' than school while simultaneously encompassing the desire to do things differently" (Pattison 2015, p.1). Pattison (2015) says in summary that home-education is:

> legal, yet the site of much official unrest; a point of political resistance and point of personal defence; heavily frowned upon and idealistically championed. It is described both as a safe haven for children and families and as a form of abuse. It physically disrupts the social rules of time and space, and conceptually disturbs the cultural and social binaries of home and school. It is an *othered* and othering space of society. (p.16)

The sites of contestation outlined by Pattison (2015) implicate the methodological style and approaches used by researchers of home-education. Interestingly, the numbers of children apparently currently being home-educated are documented inconsistently and varying by author (see Webb 2010). Home-education advocates, such as Fortune-Wood (2005; 2006), have tended to assume higher estimates, suggesting a figure of up to 150,000, while Government-

commissioned reports, for example, have tended to use more conservative estimates of the number of children currently being home-educated – generally around 40,000 (Badman 2009).

Moreover, in her multi-method research design, Nelson (2013) found that some home-educating parents were reluctant to support the use of the quantitative activity that she had designed in her research with home-educated children. Central to this was their objection to, what they perceived as, restricting and unhelpful formal learning activities. To move beyond these divisions, Pattison (2015) suggests that researchers of home-education should explore new ideas through the application of old ones. As she explains,

> [t]he rise of home-education offers the chance to consider the legitimacy of current understandings of education and the limits and restrictions of the conceptual tools on which this understanding is founded. (p.17)

Writing in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Pattison (2015) explores the coexistence of mainstream schooling and the alternative of home-education. Crucially, she argues that the Badman era was a time when "[t]he philosophical divide between autonomous home-educators and advocates of education as schooling created a communicative impasse, as reported to the Select Committee" (Thomas and Pattison 2009, cited in Pattison 2015, p.3). In describing the impacts of this communicative impasse, Pattison (2015) argues the opportunity to expand debate on alternative education and its relationship to mainstream conventions was lost.

2.10 Summary

This chapter has reviewed a comprehensive range of empirical studies on home-education. Concentrating mostly on contributions to the field, I outlined several substantive gaps in the literature. Crucially, I showed that exploring the unknown territory of new technologies and online networks would contribute towards a more contemporary understanding of what home-education is and how it is achieved. Furthermore, I argued that there is a need for a different kind of research: that is, focused and empirically driven. The wider body of home-education texts characterised by partisanship calls for a more objective and critical reading of the topic. More broadly, my research focus and methodological style offers a valuable step in moving home-education beyond the realm of unhelpful binaries and unchallenged value judgements. Thus, I clearly set out why undertaking this study was both warranted and much needed. In the next chapter (*Chapter three*), I explain the research design and tools used to achieve these ambitions.

Chapter 3 : Research design and data collection

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research strategy, design and data collection tools used in this study. First, I present the central questions of this thesis and describe how they evolved as my knowledge of the research topic deepened. I then outline the mixed methods research strategy that underpinned the selection and design of the qualitative and quantitative techniques used. This included an online survey, semi-structured interviews and focus groups with home-educators, children and young people. The issues regarding access and sampling techniques are also discussed. I describe the role I undertook while conducting research in multiple settings and I examine the challenges of building relations of trust from the position of an outsider. Subsequently, I outline some of the ethical issues that this research raised in connection with informed consent, harm and risk and the steps taken to address them. Furthermore, I consider some of the methodological implications of using the internet as a tool for recruitment and reflect on the strengths and limitations of using alternative interview mediums. I then present descriptions of the data cohorts that form the research population of this study. I close with a summary and set out the focus of the second methods chapter (*Chapter four*).

3.2 Research strategy

The nature of my social inquiry was inherently exploratory. Thus, I anticipated that my understanding and interpretation of the topic would emerge cumulatively and through consideration of multiple units of analysis alongside one another. I therefore sought a research approach capable of generating meaningful and in-depth understanding within the situated and collective practices of multiple individuals (micro) and groups (meso). Mixed methods research was best suited to this. Mixed methods research methodology encompasses a broad spectrum of mixing, combining and integrating quantitative and qualitative data collection tools, perspectives and research paradigms (Mason 2006). I recognise that within this broad church there are several arguments that position the use, application and philosophical implications of mixed methodology in different ways. What follows is an account of the strand of mixed methods research that I used.

3.3 Research questions

The overarching aim of this study was to explore the role of new technologies among communities, educators and learners in home-education. Subsidiary to this was to consider the ways in which the appropriation of new technologies might have reconfigured what home-education is and how it is achieved. The three research questions that guided the focus of this thesis are as follows:

1. How have different home-education groups organised themselves through the appropriation of new technologies and in what ways does this affect the construction of home-education knowledge online?

2. What is the place of online networks and communities in the discovery of home-education and how is this significant for families at the point of entry?

3. How and in what ways do online networks facilitate pedagogical practices and identities and what are the consequences of this for the function of home-education?

Initially, I was broadly interested in online media technologies, representations, and the everyday practices of home-education families. The design of my survey and interview schedules covered a range of different topics rather than the use of new technologies alone. When conducting initial interviews with online moderators, I realised that different Yahoo! and Facebook groups support different kinds of networks and communities. I was interested in how the coexistence of offline and online domains of communication may have shaped the possible organisational structures in home-education communities. This led me to think about how the composition and structures of different offline home-education communities (e.g. neighbourhood groups) consequently may have changed. While interviewing different parents, children and young people I began to see how the knowledge shared between home-educators online (on Yahoo! and Facebook) were connected in several ways to the educational and social practices of different families offline.

Through the accounts of my participants, I became aware of the various ways in which parents, children and young people see themselves in relation to others. I also observed that online networks had different uses across multiple families who were at various stages in their home-education journey. Collectively, these realisations influenced the further development of my research questions. Answered sequentially, these issues sought to narrate the interwoven, multifaceted and dynamic role of new technologies networks and communities in home-education through ideas of production, contextualisation and reproduction (Bernstein 1975). This is discussed further in *Chapter four*, where I set out the development of my conceptual toolkit.

3.3.1 Mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way

The social world is inherently complex and multifaceted. Thus, the research strategies that social researchers adopt need to be multidimensional in their design and application. Crucially, both quantitative and qualitative methods offer different ways of knowing. Mason (2006) argued that social science research methods should seek to situate the lived experiences and relations between individuals residing in this complex world. Notably, quantitative methods can help

researchers to situate the relations between different subjective experiences as part of a multidimensional approach. In this way, researchers can arrive at more 'significant' and 'well-rounded' theory building (Mason 2006, p.15). Thus, quantitative methods can be utilised to frame a qualitatively driven research inquiry in a useful and supportive way.

As discussed earlier, when starting this thesis, I read widely in my efforts to form a coherent and meaningful inquiry. This activity reflects a process of 'thinking qualitatively' about the research problem (Mason 2002). The choice, design and application of data collection tools emerged from a pragmatic, strategic and self-reflexive thought process. My approach therefore resembled that of *bricolage* (Denzin and Lincoln 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) interpreted this approach as "[a] complex, sense, reflective collage-like creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings and interpretations of the world or phenomena under analysis" (p.6). However, this approach is not without its critics (see Hammersley 1999). Moreover, I recognise that the decision to work across different research paradigms raises many tensions and I address some of these below.

3.3.2   Reconciling the qualitative/quantitative divide

Qualitative research is traditionally situated in paradigmatic opposition to quantitative research theoretical traditions and vice versa. Historically, scholars have argued for the fundamental incompatibility of an empiricist inquiry that seeks to generate facts about the social world and one that wants to interpret the ways in which that same world is socially constructed. It follows that there are epistemological and ontological inconsistencies between the implied existence of an observable and objective social world (quantitative) and the one that is instead socially constructed (qualitative). Therefore, combining both qualitative and quantitative methods was traditionally seen as undesirable and inappropriate. However, others suggest that the paradigmatic divide between both methodologies is artificial and somewhat overinflated in such debates. There are of course limits to both paradigms, yet both quantitative and qualitative methods can offer value to social research (Mason 2006). To some extent, the paradigmatic tensions surfaced by mixed methods research are unresolvable. This is because it is almost impossible to prove which paradigm one is working within (Bazeley 2004). In the realm of the social, you cannot physically step into someone's subjectivity to determine which paradigm or position they are working within (Bazeley 2004). Indeed, broader trends in mixed methods research favour 'pragmatism over purity'. Miles and Huberman (1994) illustrated how researchers should seek to answer if, how and why "two sorts of data and associated methods can be linked to study design" (p.41). This shift emphasises that researchers should seek to produce traceable and explicit accounts of their intents and practices

in implementing a mixed methods research strategy (Greene and Caracelli 1997). In the light of these considerations, in this study, I took on board Mason's (2006) view that "the value of such approaches must be judged in relation to their theoretical logic, and the kinds of questions about the social world they enable us to ask and answer" (p.10).

3.3.3 Challenges and pitfalls

Even if one accepts the irreconcilable paradigmatic tensions in favour of a more pragmatic approach, mixed methodology research raises several other substantive issues. On a practical level, the use of 'mixed' and multiple tools can be time-consuming in their design and application. This can considerably lengthen the analysis and write-up period. On a more critical level, researchers risk applying tacit knowledge of other research methodologies without an explicit awareness of the advantages and limitations of doing so (Bazeley 2004). In this respect, their biases towards the research traditions within which they have been immersed, rather than how best to answer the research questions set, might influence their tendency to select methods (Bryman 1988). Moreover, researchers are likely to encounter pitfalls during the writing-up process if, for instance, conclusions are drawn before both qualitative and quantitative data have been analysed together (if they are analysed together at all). This, Bazeley (2004) suggested, could potentially result in a disjointed and repetitive interpretation. For these reasons, she argued, it is "[b]etter to progressively unveil relevant evidence on a path to a common conclusion, than to organise on the basis of method" (p.9).

Furthermore, while a mixed methods research strategy can serve to extend, confirm or supplement ways of thinking about a subject, validity is not automatically enhanced. As with any other approach, enhanced validity is achieved only through the appropriate, rigorous and thoughtful application of methods. What is essential is the careful balancing of evidence with 'adherence' to relevant rules and research traditions (Bazeley 2004, p.10). The steps taken to minimise these pitfalls are clearly set out in the following discussion.

3.3.4 An overview of the research design

The multi-methods used to gather my data consisted of a variety of techniques including i) an online survey, ii) semi-structured interviews with adults and families, and iii) focus groups with young people. Figure 3.3.4 provides an overview of the data collection phases and methods used at each stage. The primary data collection for this research took place over a three-month period between May and July 2013. Four main phases of data collection took place in succession. See Figure 3.3.4 for details:

Figure 3.3.4: Research design: primary data collection phases

1. Online survey

2. Semi-structured Interviews with online moderators

3. Semi-structured interviews with home-educators/families

4. Participant observation & informal group interviews with home-educated young people
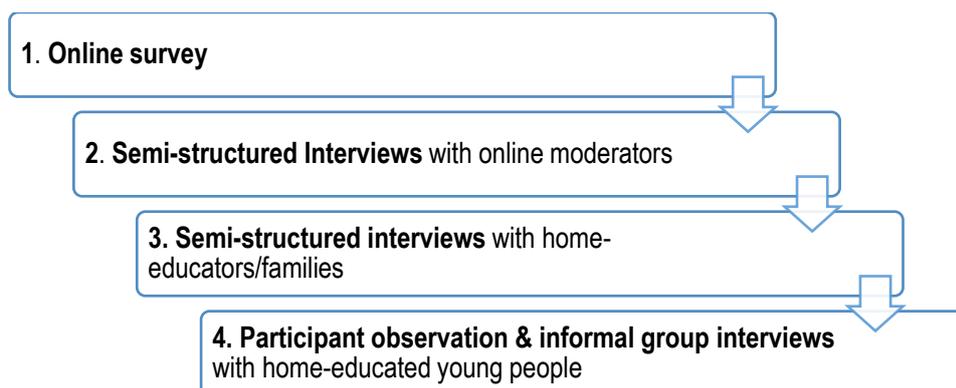
Table 3.3.4, below, provides a broad overview of the research phase, group, method and sample obtained using this research design.

Table: 3.3.4: Sample group overview

	Group	Method	Sample
Phase 1	Home-educators in England, Wales & Scotland	Online survey	242 responses
Phase 2	Online moderators	Semi-structured interviews	12 semi-structured interviews
Phase 3	Home-educators/families & children	Semi-structured interviews	32 semi-structured interviews
Phase 4	Home-educated young people	Participant observation & group interviews	8 informal group interviews

First, I provide a description of the strengths and potential pitfalls of conducting online surveys and using the internet as a method of recruitment. I then outlined the strengths and limitations of conducting one-to-one interviews using a variety of different mediums (face to face, telephone, Skype and email). Next, I describe why I chose to carry out family interviews and focus groups as additional techniques in this study.

3.4 Quantitative methods: an online survey

With little numerical data on home-educating families, I wanted to gain an empirically driven understanding of the basic demographics of home-educating families. Moreover, others such as Rothermel (2003) have alluded to the sheer diversity of ideologies, experiences and interests home-educators have. Using Marpsat and Razafindratsima's (2010) criteria, home-educators are defined as a hard-to-reach population because

- home-educating families are estimated to account for less than 1% of the overall population

- as a population, home-educators/families are invisible and hard to identify because they do not share a common access point and it is suggested that they are geographically dispersed

- there is no large-scale national data set that comprehensively describes these families, so it would be difficult to construct a comprehensive sampling frame, and

- other researchers have found that home-educators/families have in the past faced hostility/negativity/stereotyping from non-members of their communities.

The use of survey methods in social research is a well-established research tool within the social sciences (Bryman 2008). Currently, the use of survey software packages to conduct and disseminate questionnaires *via online communities* is something still considered 'novel' within education research. Yet, in other fields, e.g. health communication, where researchers have sought to access traditionally 'hard-to-reach' populations, this technique offers several advantages in comparison to traditional methods of survey research (Baltar and Brunet 2012).

One of the merits of the use of online networks and online communities to survey hard-to-reach groups is that it offers access to a geographically dispersed population (Wright 2005). First, it allows researchers to access in one place concentrations of otherwise difficult-to-find groups who share mutual points of interests and beliefs. It allows researchers to reach a very large number of such individuals in a short space of time despite geographical distance (Wright 2005).

Moreover, this method offers researchers the opportunity to design, distribute, analyse and export surveys in a timely and profitable manner. It would cost significantly more in time and money to find an equivalent sample size using traditional paper survey techniques. The self-completed nature and the medium of this survey technique mean that researchers are free to conduct preliminary analyses while waiting for the numbers to accumulate. This is beneficial for lone researchers who have limited resources. For these reasons, in the first stage of this research I chose to use online survey methodology as a resource to generate new data on home-educators and to subsequently reach a more diverse research population of home-education families. There are a few methodological issues associated with the use of online surveys (e.g. selection bias), and I address each of these in relation to my own experiences of using this technique in the following sections.

3.4.1 Survey design

The survey design was influenced by the literature scoping exercise and through informal online observations. The design of this research tool sought to capture a broad profile of home-educating

families residing across the UK. It consisted of a mixture of 55 open and closed questions on a range of topics, which included the following (see Appx. 1 for a paper version):

- gender, ethnic group & country of birth
- county of UK residence & geography (urban, rural, suburban)
- parental qualification levels & occupational social class
- current economic activity and employment history
- religious affiliation and importance
- cohabitation status & employment of partner (if applicable)
- family size: number of children in families
- gender and ages of children
- reasons for home-education
- children's previous and current forms of educational provision (where applicable)
- types and extent of online media technologies use in families
- membership of and participation in organisations and groups for home-education
- LA relations
- media and Government representations of home-education.

The survey was designed using the online software package Qualtrics.[17] Qualtrics is a relatively automated package that offers good design templates, statistical analysis and imitative report functions. I found Qualtrics to be very intuitive and it was easy to build an aesthetically pleasing and simple-to-use survey. To avoid multiple entries from the same person, the survey could be completed only once and offered respondents the possibility of saving and returning to their entry. The categories derived from the survey data encompass a range of different measures. Moreover, where appropriate, I used the primary set of harmonised concepts used in UK Government social surveys for the question design on ethnic groups, and occupational and qualification levels (ONS 2016a). For further details, please see Appx. 1.

3.4.2 Ethical considerations

It was important that prospective survey respondents could make an informed decision to participate in the survey. By following the link provided, they were directed to an information page (detailing my research and contact information) and a consent question that gave respondents the option to choose to participate. For further information on the survey design and consent 'button', please see Appx.1. Moreover, the last question in the survey offered participants the option to

---

[17] For more information and a demo, see www.qualtrics.com.www.qualtrics.com

'consider participating in a follow-up interview', in response to which they could either select 'no, thank you' or 'yes, please email me the details'. If participants consented to this, a blank box was made available to disclose a contact email address. The survey entries were automatically anonymised through the generation of a unique respondent ID. The email addresses served as the only identifiable and sensitive information that connected some of the data entries to individual cases. Once the survey was deactivated, the survey responses were exported to SPSS and Microsoft Excel and stored securely and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 on my password-protected computer.

3.4.3 Generating the sample

My target population was parents/carers who currently home-educate in the UK. I generated the sample by circulating the survey across several online Yahoo! groups and Facebook groups reported to support home-education in the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). The criteria used to select these online groups were as follows:

- hosted by either Yahoo! groups or Facebook groups
- stated in their title and/or information/group description page that they intended to support the population of home-educators in the UK
- membership only (open to home-educators or those seriously considering it).

The decision to generate the survey sample using this method and these criteria was taken for two main reasons. First, many of the larger Facebook groups have large memberships (e.g. 'Home-education UK' had a total of 6,000 members in 2013). Crucially, in their research Baltar and Brunet (2012) found that virtual sampling via Facebook, coupled with an online questionnaire, yielded a higher response rate than traditional snowballing methods. In applying this approach, the researchers improved the efficacy of their snowball sample of Argentinean entrepreneurs living in Spain. Baltar and Brunet (2012) thus advocated the virtual possibilities of using social networking platforms such as Facebook for gaining a larger and more representative sample of 'hard-to-reach' groups.

However, one of the limitations associated with generating samples using virtual groups is that it is even harder to construct an accurate sampling frame. This is because there is no fixed or identifiable population from which one can project or plan to target (Wright 2005). Participation in online communities and networks is by nature sporadic and changeable. Depending on the nature of the group and on the subjects discussed, there are likely to be those individuals who are 'old-timers' and who contribute on a regular basis (Wenger 2008), while others are likely to 'lurk' and

thus are hidden to members of the group. This, therefore, increases the risk of selection bias, whereby individuals with a greater stake in participating in that group are disproportionately represented in the survey sample.

With this in mind, I constructed a large sampling frame using all the public information available to me. After following various group web addresses publicly available on the Education Otherwise website, I found that the titles and information pages of several Yahoo! groups seemed to indicate that these spaces supported home-educators who meet offline. As the national charity Education Otherwise purports:

> Home-educators around the UK have organised themselves into local groups, providing mutual support, sharing information and resources, and often meeting regularly for social and educational activities. (educationotherwise.net 2016)

In addition to this, the membership-only groups that were visible via the Yahoo! and Facebook groups search facilities typically stated that they were only open to 'home-educators or those seriously considering it'. With online surveying, there is an increased risk of obtaining spam or answers outside of one's target group, particularly if surveys are freely available to a large heterogeneous online population. The existence of 'membership approval' criteria in the kinds of online groups sampled in this research was likely to reduce this risk of sampling error in my online survey population.

One of the broader limitations of this method is that of the more endemic biases associated with the kinds of social groups who do/do not have access to the internet in the first place. For example, in August 2016 the ONS reported that nearly all adults aged 16–24 years had daily 'on the go' access to the internet, compared with just 33% of those aged 65 years and over (ONS 2016b). I would therefore anticipate that my survey sample is unrepresentative of wider social groups who have limited internet access, i.e. Gypsies and Travellers (Fensham-Smith 2014).

3.4.4 Approaching the sample

Ethical considerations influenced the methods by which I obtained access to the population of survey respondents in this study. Given the expansion and extended use of the internet in recent years, its scope and context pose several distinct theoretical and practical ethical considerations, which need to be separately addressed. The dynamic and highly contextual nature of the internet as a site of research requires an active engagement with a host of considerations such as

- how the users of online Yahoo! and Facebook groups might perceive the forum, i.e. private, public, etc., and;
- whether there are distinctions between local contextual norms, e.g. terms of service.

The 2012 ethical guidelines issued by the Association of Internet Researchers shaped how I actively negotiated considerations such as what constitutes 'public' and/or 'closed' online spaces and the expectations of privacy among users (AoIR 2012). Additionally, the broader ethical foundations in the UN Declaration of Human Rights 1948, the Nuremberg Code, the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report 1974 were also consulted. Moreover, I also reviewed both the ethical guidance issued by the British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC 2012). Crucially, nearly all the domain pages that I had searched for stated explicitly that the Yahoo!/Facebook groups were for 'current home-educators' and/or for those 'seriously considering it'. In some instances, the information page stated that LA personnel and research students were not allowed to join. For these reasons, the boundaries between public and private were clearly delineated.

Subsequently, the moderators of the online Yahoo! and Facebook groups were asked to circulate a live link to the survey on my behalf. Thus, online moderators were the gatekeepers, or 'seeds', using their own contacts to distribute the survey in what was a non-traditional form of snowball sampling. On Yahoo! groups, I used a publicly available group email address to establish contact. Similarly, on Facebook, I used its private messaging facility to communicate with the administrators of the group as a non-member.

Using these facilities, I sent an email detailing information about my research, a link to my academic profile, and a link to a pilot version of the online survey for their perusal. This provided moderators with the opportunity to ask me any questions and to contact me before agreeing to circulate a 'live link to the survey' to the main page of their group. Notably, Baltar and Brunet (2012) have highlighted how, when using this method of sampling, fostering openness and transparency with the moderators of online groups is essential for maximising the likelihood of a good response rate.

3.4.5 Response rate

In total, I received email confirmation that they had circulated a live link to my survey from the online moderators of 29 different Yahoo! and Facebook groups. In Table 3.4.5, I provide the breakdown for the number of moderators contacted and the numbers who agreed to circulate the survey:

Table 3.4.5: Groups' response rate

Yahoo! groups for UK home-education
I. Email requests sent to the moderators of 85 different groups
II. 25 online moderators responded

III.	22 agreed to circulate the survey link to the groups that they moderated
Facebook groups for UK home-education	
I.	Email requests sent to the moderators of 40 different groups
II.	9 online moderators responded
III.	7 agreed to circulate the survey link to the groups that they moderated

Attempting to sample a hidden population in social research is inherently problematic. Although snowball sampling has advantages, Lee (1999) asserted that it is inevitably biased because "the social relations which underpin the sampling procedure tend towards reciprocity and transitivity" (p.67).

The online survey remained active on Qualtrics for six weeks. During that time, I received 242 'valid entries' (entries that were less than 70% complete were deemed invalid and not recorded[18]). However, I received most my responses in the first two weeks after my survey went online. After this time, the numbers substantially dropped. One of the virtues and the limitations of using this method in my research was that I received a significant number of responses within a short but intense period of data collection. This was useful because being able to conduct a preliminary analysis of entries as and when they arrived allowed me to plan the design of other data collection tools.

3.4.6 Shortcomings

On average, the online survey took 25 minutes to complete. One survey respondent contacted me to express her objection to a form of research that sought to quantify characteristics or practices in home-education. As the respondent explained via email,

> I wanted to be supportive of your work but … We are all very busy – you have three minutes of my time now … We also struggle with putting complex ideas into simplified boxes – most home-educators don't like doing this which is why we go to great lengths not to do it to our children. That is three minutes up … **(Survey respondent)**

This feedback exemplifies how this respondent felt that her experiences were somewhat simplified within the context of survey research. This supports Lee's (1999) observation that survey research can objectify the experiences of sensitive groups in research.

The shortness and 'relative intensity' of the period within which my survey was circulated to several Yahoo! and Facebook groups may have contributed to a perception of intrusion or annoyance among some individuals. The reliance on online moderators to determine when and where a link

---

[18] After exploring several responses in the initial sample, I found that responses that were identified as only 70% complete were typically missing significant portions of data and were rendered to render them substantially incomplete. For these reasons, in the screening process I excluded these incomplete surveys from the data set.

would be circulated meant that I had little control over the prospect of 'saturation'. In an email exchange, one online moderator rather bluntly implied that simultaneous visibility of my survey link across many online groups was detracting from the important conversations taking place between home-educators:

> Your survey is already up on the main groups, so I am sure that you will get plenty of replies from that … [W]e have to focus on the relevant information in our own community right now so I don't think it is necessary to share the link in [name of group]. **(OM)**

I graciously accepted this moderator's choice not to circulate the link and offered my details in case anyone wished to contact me in writing and/or person. Although this was just one negative reaction, it is hard to know if this is something that might have hindered my sample size. I also received several positive and interested emails from respondents and will discuss this further in relation to positionality between the researcher and the researched.

3.5   Qualitative methods: interviews

Given the exploratory nature of my research inquiry, coupled with the broad range of online moderators, families, parents, children and young people that I sought to sample, my data collection methods had to be flexible. Due to the issues around access, I had to accommodate the possibility of conducting the research across multiple contexts (cafes, village halls and homes). Moreover, I had to adapt my techniques to accommodate practical issues associated with travel in addition to the interests and needs of my participants. Thus, my analytical interests could only be fulfilled through adopting a systematic yet pragmatic approach to the use of interview mediums and settings.

I selected semi-structured interviews because, as a research tool, this method offers a focused yet flexible way of eliciting rich and meaningful qualitative data (Bryman 2008). The purposes of this approach were therefore to capture and understand themes "of the lived daily world from the subjects' own perspectives" (Kvale 1996, p.27). Given the planned scope of my design, research aims and different data collection components, it was important to yield a data set that could be analysed cross-sectionally. It was not feasible to systematically integrate different units of analysis without the possibility of comparison across different data cohorts. At the same time, however, there were different areas that I subsequently planned to focus on following my interviews. One of the criticisms of carrying out one-off interviews is that there is limited time to develop a strong rapport with participants. As Lee (1999) suggested, techniques that involve follow-up work with participants offer multiple opportunities to resolve interviewee anxieties.

3.5.1 Interview groups

There are different ways to approach sampling in mixed methods research. Some, as Flick (2007) explained, are more formal than others. This research design was not envisaged based on constructs or fine lines of inquiry. Given the issues relating to access and the explorative nature of my inquiry, the notion of what Miles and Huberman (1994) described as a 'loose' rather than a 'tight' approach captures my sampling strategy. Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that this flexible and more open approach is useful when concepts are not very well defined. Designs are instead informed and constructed through methodological suggestions.

I.   Online moderators

I chose to sample online moderators because, as a group, they were likely to hold a unique and overarching knowledge of the Facebook and Yahoo! spaces that they moderated, both in terms of the kinds of information shared between members and the different characteristics of the members who used these groups. Thus, I felt that their insight would be valuable in understanding the kinds of relations, informational and social support that these spaces intended to offer to their members. I was as inclusive as possible regarding my approach to this sample group. The decision-making process for selection was based on a combination of flexibility, convenience and my acquired understanding of the characteristics of the wider population of home-educators, above (England, Wales and Scotland).

II.   Home-educators and home-educated learners

This group offered insight into how online networks and other new technologies featured in the pedagogical practices and identities of both home-educators and learners. Moreover, as a group, home-educating families have unique needs, interests and experiences (Pattison and Thomas 2010). My aims were to involve children as well as parents as much as possible. Home-educators and home-educated children gave me an insight into how the information and groups featured in the everyday lives of different families.

III.   Home-educated young people

The experiences of older young people who were transitioning to new pathways (i.e. sixth form and/or higher education) were advantageous in acquiring a reflective understanding of their past experiences of home-education and new technologies. I also sought to understand in greater depth their own online networks and new technologies and the value for their own experiences of home-education, and the effects on it, that participation in these networks and technologies had. This, I felt, would generate a more holistic and multidimensional understanding, not just of the networks

that parents used, but also of the networks established among young people between and outside of the family.

3.5.2 Interview designs

I designed a semi-structured interview schedule for online moderators that reflected my interests in the intended purpose, use and membership of the Yahoo! and/or Facebook groups that each participant was responsible for moderating. The interview schedules consisted of 29-27 (depending on the interview group) open questions that covered a broad range of topics, including

- reasons for home-education and the decision to home-educate
- influential styles of and approaches to home-education
- families' use of new technologies and online networks
- social networks and participation in home-education and non-home-education communities offline
- everyday practices, structure and timetabling
- resources used for home-education
- the home-educator role
- children's learning styles
- greatest pleasures and limitations of home-education
- public, media and official representations of home-education
- perceived prevalence of home-education
- impact of home-education on familial relationships and identities, and
- intended outcomes for home-education.

Please see Appx. 2 and 3 for a full breakdown of the nature and order of questions asked during interviews.

3.5.3 Access and recruitment

Almost all the research participants in this study were recruited via email. I gained access this population via the data obtained from my online survey. Following the preliminary overview of the survey data, I contacted all the participants via email to ask if they would be interested in participating in an interview, over the telephone, via Skype or face to face. In this email, I attached an information sheet and consent form, as well as a link to my online academic profile at Cardiff University (see Appx. 5 for details). Initially, I planned to conduct a cluster analysis using SPSS to identify and sample from groups in my survey population that were most dissimilar to one another. However, what became apparent in the early stages of this process was that, of the 120 participants

whom I had contacted, only a small fraction had emailed me back. The momentum of the data collection was moving, and my study was currently fresh in their minds, but I was worried that waiting for several weeks or months for replies would risk a reduction in the number of participants recruited. The practicalities and costs associated with travelling around England and Wales further amplified my concerns. Within these conditions, the criterion of convenience, therefore, became a primary choice in the decision-making processes (Patton 1988).

I recruited an additional four adult participants and 23 young people directly, using a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques while at a camping festival for home-educating families (see section 3.5.6).

3.5.4 Individual interviews with adults

I found that there were a few advantages in accessing and approaching the interview populations in the way that I did. The unique response ID meant that I linked each survey response to the prospective participant through their email address (if they chose to disclose it). Before – or often on my way travelling to – interviews, responses to the interview participants meant that before our interviews, I familiarised myself with the key characteristics and/or issues presented in their survey responses. This was something that I found helpful in tailoring probes, and it also provided a broad basis of prior knowledge of things such as how many children were in the family, the ages of those children, the kinds of internet technologies used by the family, etc. For example, one survey respondent indicated that she used 'virtual worlds' (e.g. Second Life[19]) to support her sons' 'home-education'. During our telephone conversation, I explored this further when administering interview schedules, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

> **Interviewer:** So, in the survey you mentioned that you use virtual worlds for home-education, I was wondering if you could tell me a bit more about that?
>
> **Interviewee:** Oh, um, Second Life and World of Warcraft, those sort of role-playing games … I mean he went in one where you have to … well, he joined a guild … you know a lot of these places have guilds. Do you know about that?
>
> **Interviewer:** No, I don't. Please tell me more.

Although this participant's son has not used Second Life, for instance, as much in recent years, this seed of knowledge was enough to elicit a lengthy conversation about how this participant and her son used to enter Second Life together with their respective avatars. In some cases, the survey data acted as a prompt or memory jogger to unlock more in-depth accounts by my interviewee

---

[19] For further information, please visit: http://secondlife.com/.http://secondlife.com/

participants (thus enhancing the validity of both the survey data and strengthening the survey outputs).

During the interviews, I often used the scoping exercise as a way in to explain that I empathised with some of the ways in which home-education has been unfairly portrayed. I was open and honest about my own experiences of being bullied and of not particularly enjoying school, but at the same time I explained that it allowed me to pursue this subject, which I have since loved and committed my early adult life to. At the same time, I still felt that I should give them something to address the power imbalance of me as the information taker and them as the information givers. Arguably, this demonstrates the practice of what Brinkmen and Kvale (2015) call the sensitive and interpretative interviewer craftsman. In this way, the nature of my conduct as an interviewer was empathetic and non-judgemental of the perspectives and truths articulated by participants. Reflections on the positionality of researcher are presented in Section 3.7.2.

3.5.5 Faceless interviewing: Skype and telephone mediums

For pragmatic reasons, I conducted most interviews with online moderators via telephone or Skype (video conferencing) and only in exceptional circumstances did I conduct them over email correspondence. For the cohort of online moderators, the use of telephone interviewing was largely a pragmatic decision as I wanted to preserve my limited research funds for the travel expenses associated with interviewing families across England, Wales and Scotland in phase 3 of my data collection. However, the use of multiple interview formats, across several different 'research spaces', yielded distinct challenges. The reception to my interview follow-up requests highlighted the fact that to negotiate an interview date and time, I had to be able to 'slot in' around the busy timetables of my interviewees. In several instances, parents were helping their children to prepare to sit GCSEs. The looming exam season and other commitments meant that it was typical for participants to respond with "I am free for the next hour if you like". This often meant arranging interviews and organising travel at a moment's notice. As a researcher, adopting a flexible and empathetic approach facilitated the successful negotiation of this process. Moreover, the existence of what was effectively a contact list of potential interviewees meant that I could discuss, organise and negotiate access with multiple participants in a single day. This yielded a more efficient and effective method of accessing a population traditionally considered 'hard to reach'.

Participating in qualitative interviewing can be "time consuming, privacy endangering, and intellectually and emotionally demanding" (McCracken 1988, p.27). Telephone interviewing offers access to groups who are difficult to access because of either their reluctance to participate in face-to-face interviews or their geographical location (Creswell 1998, cited in Sturges and Hanrahan

2004). In addition to the cost and time-saving benefits of telephone interviewing, in their research Greenfield et al. (2000) found that telephone interviews were helpful for researching sensitive topics. They reported that the relative anonymity of telephone interviews increased participants' perceptions of autonomy. Greenfield et al. (2002) suggested that this was likely to increase the validity of elicited data. Moreover, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) also found that telephone interviews were neither better nor worse than face-to-face mediums, and that the former could be used productively in qualitative research.

The use of telephone modes of interviewing is commonly critiqued as a method that fosters weaker validity due to the potential for misunderstandings between interviewer and interviewee because of clarification and assurance issues. However, Irvine et al. (2013) suggested that the assumption that face-to-face interviews typically lead to a breakdown in communication due to a lack of comprehension, rapport and naturalness is perhaps overstated (p.12). In their exploratory content analysis research comparing both mediums, they suggested that while telephone interviews tended to be shorter and exhibited more frequent instances of clarification, this medium did not increase difficulties in substantive understanding.

The use of telephone interviewing was advantageous during this research in that I was able to interview anyone who was willing to be interviewed irrespective of geographic location or personal circumstances.[20] Telephone interviews were offered to several participants who, due to circumstances, were unable to participate in face-to-face interviews. For instance, I interviewed a parent who, in addition to home-educating, acted as a full-time carer for her severely autistic son. This parent explained that my physical presence in her home might have exacerbated her son's anxiety and thus elevated the possibility of harm and disruption. In situations, such as this, it was advantageous to be able to interview a parent, even if it was not my planned option. Similarly, I could extend the possibility of participation to individuals who otherwise have been excluded because they lived a considerable distance from my home. Moreover, telephone interviews offered a considerable degree of freedom and flexibility. I planned and amended interview times to suit the busy schedules of my participants. I would argue that this was a major factor in the timely and efficient collection of data.

However, the use of telephone interviews was not without limitations. During these interviews, the absence of visual cues was difficult to negotiate. Where appropriate, I consciously adopted

unobtrusive forms of verbal communication that demonstrated my interest and attention to the interviewee (Chapple 1999, cited in Irvine et al. 2013).

For one parent, who was deaf, the first (face-to-face), and second (telephone) interview media were not a viable option. Instead, I offered her the option of a Skype interview via the Internet Relay Chat function. Had this medium not been available, this participant would have effectively been excluded from participating in the research (Hanna 2012). Interestingly, Flick (2009) argued that the synchronous interactions that take place using this asynchronous relay communication platform are plausibly like real-time interactions. However, my experience of using Skype Instant Messenger as an interview medium resonated with Evans et al.'s (2008) more critical observations. Evan et al. (2008) suggested that the absence of visual and interpersonal elements detrimentally affects the quality and consistency of interactions. On this occasion, I found it difficult to judge when the interviewee had finished 'speaking'/typing. This in turn made it difficult to judge when to prompt while at the same time demonstrating to the interviewee that I was reviewing her text response with my full attention. I also observed that this interviewee appeared to frequently revise her written responses. One can infer that she might have been overly cautious about the information she disclosed. The increased self-awareness of the interviewee was perhaps exacerbated by the process of reading our relay conversation on-screen. At several points, this made our conversation stilted rather than enhancing it. Based on my experience of conducting telephone interviews, Skype Internet Relay Chat proved to be the most limiting non-face-to-face medium.

Perhaps most limiting of all the interview mediums used during this data collection phase was email, used to conduct interviews with two of the online moderators in my sample. In terms of yielding rich and meaningful data, this technique was particularly challenging. I recognised these potential limitations, which is why I was keen to offer the option of telephone or Skype prior to offering an email interview. In one instance, however, an online moderator explained that she was very busy and would only be able to reply to questions a handful at a time via email. Consequently, this interview was substantially shorter than the interviews using other mediums. It was also difficult to clarify questions to the participant retrospectively. My role as interviewer was to "clarify and extend the meanings of the interview statements, providing interpretations of what is said, which may be disconfirmed or confirmed by the interviewee" (Brinkmen and Kvale 2015, p.195). The medium of Skype Internet Relay Chat made putting this into practice challenging at times. For example, during the one and only interview that I conducted using Skype's 'instant message' facility (as discussed above).

3.5.6 Group interviews with families and young people

During the third phase of data collection, I planned to interview home-educating families together (parents, children and siblings) rather than on an individual basis. As Gab (2010) explains, "families are social places where language, individual and social meanings, and practices of reciprocity come together to contrive a specific research context" (p.462). Moreover, Reczek (2014) highlights that interviewing family members together offers researchers insight into how experiences and meaning are mutually negotiated and co-constructed to form a unique 'reality'. Not only is this method useful for understanding the multiple identities of people within families, but it can also shed light on the everyday relations and roles in family life. Moreover, when carried out in the home setting, this technique can be supplemented with visual information and details of spaces occupied by the family.

At the same time, a multi-family-member approach to interviewing is not without methodological limitations. Crucially, interviewing family members together rather than individually can lead to obtaining partial truths and fissures (Reczek 2014). For example, Morris (2001) found that individuals question or challenge different versions of histories, and in so doing negotiate their own partial truth within the wider context of the 'family truth'. This makes it an informative tool for eliciting the stories and experiences that are differentially co-created by family members (Reczek 2014).

The following discussion concentrates on the rationale for group interviewing, with a specific focus on the merits and challenges of family interviews in relation to my experience of using this method. I draw attention to the ways in which the interviewer/interviewee dynamic played out in unforeseen ways. Consequently, as a result of the methodological limitations of family interviewing additional data was collected to supplement the research.

During the third phase of data collection, 9 of the 32 interviews that took place (see section 3.8.3 for a full break-down of interviews) involved the participation of multiple family members across several different settings. Table 3.5.6 (see below), provides further information about the characteristics of these families, including the parents and children who participated.

Table 3.5.6: Data collection phase 3: group interviews with multiple family members

Rosa and sons
Rosa and her two sons, Shaun (13 years) and Will (10 years) were interviewed at a local library in London. Both Shaun and Will were home-educated from the outset and had never attended school. Rosa was married and her husband worked full time as a consultant. Prior to home-educating her son's full-time, Rosa had worked as a speech and language therapist.

Elsa and daughter

Elsa and her daughter Alice (seven years old) were interviewed together in a coffee shop during a sunny afternoon in the West Midlands. Alice had recently been withdrawn from a prestigious private school in the local area. Prior to being home-educated on a full-time basis, Elsa's daughter had received a year of 'flexi-schooling'- whereby she attended school for three days a week and was given permission to be home-educated for the remaining two days. Elsa's daughter was an only child. Elsa was married and her husband, whom she described as a 'high flying business man', travelled frequently due to his work commitments. Elsa had recently left part-time work in the finance sector to home-educate her daughter full-time.

Gail and daughter

Gail and her daughter Tania (14 years old) were interviewed together in the living room of their family home in the South East of England. Gail was a single parent who had been home-educating Tania for the past nine years at the time of interview. Tania had intermittently attended school for a few weeks at the age of 10 to 'try it out'. Tania was planning to study towards a GCSE in English at the time of interview. Gail was self-employed and worked from home on a part-time basis. Prior to this, she worked in IT and as a teaching assistant.

Cerian and family

Cerian, her husband Simon and her four children were interviewed together at their home in a rural area of West Wales. Cerian had one son and three daughters. The youngest was six months and the eldest was 12 years old at the time of the interview. Two of Cerian's children has attended a state maintained primary school for a year prior to being home-educated. At the time of the interview, Cerian described all her children as currently 'home-educated' (including her youngest children who were four years and six months old respectively) Cerian was a full-time home-educator. Simon was self-employed and frequently from home. Prior to home-educating, Cerian worked full-time as Maths teacher in a local Secondary school.

Nikki and sons

Nikki, and her two sons, James (18 years old) and Rupert (11 years old) were interviewed while preparing lunch at their kitchen table in their home in the South East of England. Nikki's husband and their third child Letitia (16 years old) did not participate in the interview due to college and work commitments. James had been home-educated from the outset and was in the process of finishing his A levels at a local Sixth form college. James planned to study for a Mathematics BSc at Oxford University at the time of the interview. Rupert and Letitia were also home-educated from the outset. Nikki and her husband both worked part-time. Nikki was the

primary home-educator for three days of the week, while her husband took responsibility for home-educating Rupert and Letitia for remaining two days.

Susanna and son

Susanna and her son, Elliot (seven years old) were interviewed together during a regular 'meet up' with other home-educating families at a local community centre in the South West of England. Elliot, an only child, was home-educated from the outset and had never attended school. Susanna and her husband shared joint responsibility for Elliot's home-education. Both parents worked part-time. Susanna worked as a paediatrician, and her husband also worked in the healthcare sector.

Sandra and family

Sandra, her husband John and their daughter Rachel (10 years old) were interviewed at their family home- located in a bustling suburb of South West England. Rachel had one sibling, a two year old brother who did not participate in the interview. Rachel was home-educated from the outset and had never attended school. Sandra worked from home on a part-time basis as a freelance writer, while John worked full-time as an English teacher in a state maintained secondary school. Sandra was responsible for the 'lions share' of Rachel's home education

---

Naomi and family

Naomi, her husband Derek and daughter Rebecca (15 years old) and James (13 years old) were interviewed together in restaurant South Wales. Rebecca and James were home-educated had never attended school. Naomi worked part-time as a community worker at their local church. Derek worked full-time as an A level chemistry teacher. Although Naomi was primary responsible for overseeing their children's home-education in previous years, the family described their current practise as a more of a collective 'family effort'.

Irene and son

Irene and her son Owen (9 years old) were interviewed together while sitting on a picnic blanket in field at Summerfest. Irene was a single parent who had been home-educating Owen (her only child) for just under a year at the time of the interview. Prior to being home-educated, Owen attended a local state-maintained primary school. Irene was home-educating Owen on a full-time while also working towards certification as a sports therapist. Previously, Irene worked at as teaching assistant at Owen's primary school.

Although the interviews with adults, children and young people were semi-structured, I tried wherever possible to allow the participant to elaborate on a topic. The interview schedules were implemented in a flexible way, meaning that if, as in one instance, a parent was bathing their children or needed to take bagels out of the oven, we could resume our conversation in a free-

flowing manner. Although I generally stuck to the chronology of the interview schedule, there were a few instances where I probed and/or asked additional questions. For instance, in two cases it transpired that parents also acted as online moderators. Although I was primarily focused on their families' everyday home-education practices, where appropriate I used the opportunity to include a few additional questions about the group that they moderated when we were discussing their families' use of new technologies in home-education.

In this research, it was important to provide space for the voices of the learners and children in the context of a family interview setting. In interviews where children were unconfident and relatively shy, I used more general questions that I reserved to break the ice. I also relied on items around the home as props so I could then begin a dialogue, for instance commenting on an interesting drawing. In her review of the research focusing on children's use of technologies within the home, Plowman (2014) noted the prevalence of narrow experiential research designs that often "fail to take into account the complexities of family life or to offer a child's perspective on their environment" (p.37). For example, siblings may offer a meaningful co-constructed perspective that is conceptually isolated from that of their parents (Plowman 2014).

In this research, I sought to represent wherever possible the voices of home-educated children and young people. However, in some cases parents chose not to involve their children so readily. Crucially, Dockett and Perry (2011) noted that "[w]hen research involves children, gatekeepers may limit researcher's access to participants for a range of reasons, such as sensitivity of the research topic, children's perceived competency or interest and the potential disruption to their lives" (Dockett and Perry 2011, p.238). In this way, gatekeepers can facilitate or hinder researchers' access to participants and children's access to research participation. I had little control over this decision but it did mean that the voices of some children were unheard. I reflect on the challenges of family interviews in relation to my experience of conducting research in home and community settings further in Section 3.5.7.

In a few cases, parents were keen to actively involve their children from the outset. For example, on one occasion, I interviewed a home-educating family (two parents and both adult children) over dinner at a local restaurant. In this instance, the participation of children was equal to those of the parents in terms of frequency/talking. I sensed that the interview itself had been framed by the parents as an educational activity for the whole family to reflect on their experiences of home-educating experiences while living in England. I discuss this case further in section 3.5.7. Similarly, this was also the case for another home-educator who was interviewed with her daughter. On this occasion, she had decided meet me with her daughter in a town to 'make a day

trip' out of the experience. This mother and her daughter had planned activities around the interview and, based on our informal discussions prior to the interview, it was apparent that she wanted to use the opportunity for her daughter to reflect the family's decision to home-educate. In this case, the dual participation worked well in the sense that both parent and child often entered in into dialogue with one another while relaying stories and shared memories. In this way, both mother and daughter mutually constructed responses to my questions.

When children and young people did participate with their parents, one of the difficulties I encountered was the tendency of some parents to reframe and/or steer the nature of my interview questions to elicit a response from their child/children. On the one hand the allying role of parents during the interviews where their children were also participants was helpful in terms of reiterating or asking questions when the child was shy or nervous of speaking. However, on some occasions their involvement meant that otherwise open questions that I put to their children became closed and implicitly parent-led, with the answers not being authored solely by the voices of children themselves. This was particularly apparent in one example when a parent had decided to involve her children towards the end of our interview at a local library rather than from the outset (see Table 3.5.6).

Table 3.5.6: Parent-led questioning example transcript

Parent: Can you come and answer this question, please?

*[*Children join the interview*]*

Researcher: So, what do you use Skype for?

Child 1: We use Skype for meeting with and socialising with friends really, it's fun …

Researcher: Where do, your friends live?

Child 1: Some of them live quite far away but still in [city] … one lives a couple of streets away.

Parent: Would you prefer to see them on Skype or in person?

Child 1: I would prefer to see them in person, but then again I do like talking to them on Skype, because you can do Minecraft at the same time. I prefer to see them in person …

Parent: Do you use the computer for anything else?

Child 1: We have used it for research and stuff … but when I get my own laptop I am going to use it for listening to music …

Child 2: Yeah.

Parent: In terms of the percentage of time spent on the computer versus being on Skype, what is the total percentage between the two?

Child 1: 99.9% or more

> **Parent:** Is there anything else that you do on the computer that is not in your own time?
>
> **Child 1**: No.
>
> **Child 2:** No.
>
> *Paused playback at: 112:62*
>
> *Resumed playback at: 115:20*
>
> **Parent:** Anything else that you get out of home-education … What is it to you now that you have had a chance to relax?
>
> [**Brief pause in dialogue**]
>
> **Researcher**: Okay, so how do you think children who go to school perceive home-education?
>
> Child 1: They don't think we have any friends and then we tell them that we do.
>
> **Child 2**: Yeah.
>
> **Parent**: What do you think they think of the education that you get?
>
> **Child 2**: I don't know what they think.
>
> **Child 1**: Yeah.
>
> **Parent:** Well, what do you think?
>
> **Child 2:** Ummm …
>
> **Child 1:** I think some of them might be jealous that we get to spend so much time with our parents … and they think it is just, you know, lazing around all day … on the sofa and then you play some computer games, but we don't do it that way …
>
> **Parent:** Are you happy that you don't?
>
> **Child 1:** Yes.
>
> **Child 2:** Yes, I am happy. I like doing work.

On the one hand, I was grateful to have acquired the trust and participation of this parent and her children. However, I found that in this instance parental participation altered the interviewee/interviewee dynamic. In some ways, my role as an interviewer was somewhat displaced. The challenges of accessing and conducting family interviews subsequently informed my decision to collect additional data in this research.

For the final phase of data collection, I attended a seven-day camping festival in East Anglia (England) called Summerfest. Summerfest is an annual event organised and run by home-educators. Every year it attracts around 1,800 home-educating families, who participate in a range of activities, workshops and other social events. I was fortunate enough to find out about Summerfest through a survey respondent who suggested via email that I attend. Summerfest has become an invaluable opportunity for doctoral and other students in home-education to access a

population of home-educators who reside in a vast array of places across the UK. One of the advantages of Summerfest is that it offers a naturalistic rather than an artificial setting for research.

While attending Summerfest, I conducted an additional 8 group interviews with 23 teenagers and young people who were currently or previously home-educated. Notably, Jamieson, Simpson and Lewis (2011) argues that group interviews offer potential to decrease the power between the researcher and participants, and encourage children and young people to construct meaning with their peers. Furthermore, based on their research with children aged 7–11 years, Morgan et al. (2002) found that focus groups with children "are a valuable method for eliciting children's views and experiences and complement personal interviews" (p.5). Given the practical and methodological implications of interviewing parents and children together, I sought to extend my research population to include the voices of young people (which prior to this was dominated by parental accounts). Greig et al. (2013) advocated the importance of partnership and authentic participation in research that involves children and young people. For these reasons, I designed and implemented these interviews in a more open-ended way, so that these participants had the opportunity to answer the questions in their own way.

When I was not conducting interviews, watching or listening to the workshops and the activities taking place at the festival proved to be a valuable source of rich information. It gave me a deeper understanding and knowledge of the kinds of families, communities and groups who were there, for example through listening to the lively debates on what would be the ideal way to build the ideal world that took place between teenagers and young people at 'speakers' corner'.

I attended two workshops in total, one on LAs and the other on autonomous education. The latter consisted of a panel of home-educated adults presenting and discussing with the audience their experiences of being autonomously home-educated. The nature of my participation in these workshops was minimal. At the start of the workshops I introduced myself to those sitting next to me and to the main speakers of the event. In the workshop on LAs, I asked one question during the question-and-answer element of the event on the experiences of autonomously home-educated young people. In addition to the workshops, I also attended an evening social event, which was comprised of home-educated children and young people performing songs and dances on stage in the main tent at Summerfest. This event was well attended. It gave me an insightful opportunity to observe the varied talents of many of the children and young people who attend Summerfest every year.

3.5.7 Conducting research across multiple settings

Of the one-to-one and group interviews conducted, 20 interviews took place across several 'community settings' (including local home-education groups hosted in village halls and/or community centres where networks of families gathered on a weekly basis). This also encompassed a large festival setting for home-educating families. A further 10 interviews were conducted in participant's homes across England and Wales. An additional three interviews took place in 'public spaces' including a library, coffee shop and a restaurant. In the following discussion, I describe the practical and ethical challenges encountered while conducting research across multiple settings, with a focus on working in homes and living with families at Summefest.

As a researcher working across these different settings, I viewed my own role as that of a 'traveller' who, equipped with maps, travels across the unknown landscape, learning and understanding as she navigates different terrains. It follows that the narratives she acquires may be remoulded and shaped into something that is new and meaningful (Kvale 1996). My exposition here, however, only represents short but noteworthy reflections of this journey.

Interviewing family members together in their home (where these shared experiences are mutually constructed) is that the researcher is more likely to be placed in the centre of participant's everyday practices and thoughts (Jordan 2006). At the same time, however, Hamalainen (2013) points out that "any researcher who studies families faces the challenge of entering and managing an intimate space" (p.6). The home is laden with physical boundaries and implicit memories which created unique opportunities and challenges in this research.

In '*Researching Families and Relationships: Reflections on process'*, Jamieson, Simpson and Lewis (2011) present rich extracts from the diaries of several researchers working in British Universities. The reactions, thoughts and emotions captured in these self-reflective accounts provide unique insight into the ways in which the formal and informal roles of the sociologist can become blurred when entering the private spaces of families. Across the home and community settings where home-educators, children and young people were interviewed I found that I was both 'the observer and the observed' (Jordan 2006). This was most apparent in the different strategies adopted by parents to accommodate my presence in home. For example, upon my arrival as an unfamiliar visitor, one home-educated child discretely watched me remove my shoes, before running away and returning to watch the conversation that his mother and I were having. In the home setting, Jordan (2006) points out researchers can very quickly be labelled by family members as they attempt to "construct a role for the researcher and define the situation according

to their needs, understandings and experiences" (p. 170). This was something that I was conscious of throughout my interview encounters with multiple family members.

In section 3.5.6, I explained that during the family interviews when children also participated, parents acted gatekeepers. A few of the examples presented demonstrated that the method of family interviewing worked well on several occasions. However, the use of this method surfaced a number of challenges that require further reflection. In this study, the relationship between the researcher, parents and their children was inextricably produced and altered in unforeseen ways as result of the decision to conduct home and community setting. Overall, this resulted in the more limited participation of children than was previously intended. For example, on one occasion, a home-educator had agreed to participate in a joint interview with her children and the interview location, date and time was arranged shortly after. However, when I arrived the participant's home in the South West of England two of her children had left the house to buy ice-cream in the local shop, while her third child had decided to practise the recorder. On other occasions, it was unclear if parents had explicitly wanted their children to be made 'unavailable' to me, or if this was instead a product of the child-led and autonomous styles education that the families were practicing when I arrived at the homes and community settings. Several of the parents that I spoke to felt strongly that their child should not 'be forced' to participate in any social or educational activity that they were not explicitly interest in. Thus, strongly encouraging them to participate in an interview with someone who they had only just met would have been counterintuitive to those philosophies.

Moreover, in homes and community settings when parents had explicitly encouraged their child/children to participate in the interview, there were often interesting objects and activities that served as distraction. For example, an interview in a participant's home had begun with the participation of her three children. However, after a few minutes, the participant's eldest child asked his mother if he could run under the garden hose because he was hot. All three children shortly exited the garden patio (where we had been sitting) to play together on the lawn while the mother and I continued our conversation. This signalled the end of their brief participation in the interview.

Moreover, while conducting research in homes, I faced a few diversions and 'hiccups', which on occasion obstructed some of the interviews. As Williamson, aptly remarks:

> Research rarely progresses smoothly, at theoretical, empirical or emotional levels. There is, however, an implicit expectation that should … therefore there is a reluctance to 'come clean' about the obstructions, hic-cups and diversions (Williamson 1996, p.39).

During one interview with a single parent and her son, a knock on the door resulted in a Tesco delivery. It was my automatic response to offer to help unpack the shopping, an offer the parent

accepted. Later, I wondered if this was something that I should or should not have offered to do. This participant also had several kittens who proceeded to lick and climb all over me during the interview. During another hot summer encounter, one home-educator and her children had kindly fetched me from the train station. On the walk, back to their house, the youngest child was nearly struck by a reversing truck. My consoling of this parent and agreeing that it was in fact 'a near miss' was our first interaction with one another.

I relied solely on public transport to take me to and from interview locations. Where possible, I coordinated visits with two families or more in a day. During a trip to a City in the North West of England, one of my connecting trains was cancelled. This resulted in the second family interview being cut short. On another occasion, a participant had accidentally given me the wrong house number, so I spent nearly 40 minutes searching for the right house, which meant our interview was slightly rushed so that I could catch the last off-peak train back to my area of residence. Following rigid train schedules meant that after another interview in London, with a single mum and her teenage daughter, I felt conflicted because, although the interview was officially over and I had stopped recording, she wanted to show me all the resources and pieces of work that her daughter had produced over the years. I could sense that this parent wanted someone to talk to because she disclosed personal information to me about a previous relationship. This made it even more difficult to have to leave at a set time. Moreover, I did not have the appropriate training or skills to offer support to this parent. This disclosure was certainly not something that I had anticipated. In some respects, the example above illustrates tensions between balancing time management in the pursuit of a research agenda with adequately responding to challenging or unsettling information (Williamson 1996).

Homes are very personal spaces. They are littered with artefacts and symbols of the things that families value. Photographs, drawings pinned to the fridge, toys, books, demijohns containing home-made wine, animals, washing – all these items constitute the makings of family life. As a researcher, I felt privileged to be granted access to these personal spaces. At times, however, the home setting made it difficult to manage the confidentiality and privacy of participants. For instance, it was very difficult to control when children and siblings who were not explicitly participating in the interview were present. Equally, it was difficult when some of these children interrupted or made loud noises in the room within which the interview was taking place. Wherever possible, I followed ethical guidelines to uphold the privacy, informed consent and confidentiality protocols.

Aware of the busy schedule of my participants and the valuable time they sacrificed in speaking to me, I gave a small thank-you gift to all the interviewees whom I met with face to face.

3.6 Informed consent

This research was fully approved by the ethics committee at Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences in 2013. The following sections describe the protocols and procedures used to obtain informed consent during the qualitative research phases of this research. I discuss the issues encountered and steps taken in interviewing parents, children and young people.

3.6.1 Consent from adults

Most the telephone interviews were conducted in a private interview room. An office telephone with speaker functionality was used and conversations were subsequently recorded using my personal dictaphone. Prior to commencing the interview, specially designed information sheets and consent forms were circulated to all my participants (see Appx 11.5 for examples). For practical reasons, recorded verbal consent was obtained before commencing the telephone interviews with online moderators. At the start of our conversation, I asked participants if they had had the opportunity to look over the information sheet and explained that their participation was entirely voluntary. I also informed them that anonymous extracts from the interview would appear in my PhD thesis and in subsequent associated publications. Once participants verbally agreed to proceed, I informed them that the tape recorder would remain switched on and that the interview had begun. A similar procedure was followed before the single Skype Instant Messenger interview and the two email interviews conducted. In the information sheets and during our correspondence prior to meeting face to face, I made it clear to parents that their children were more than welcome to participate in whatever capacity during the interview, but that that this was not a prerequisite.

There was one instance when, during a face-to-face interview with a parent and her child, I was required to renegotiate and acquire secondary consent. During the interview, the mother felt a sense of anxiety in discussing her previous experience of home-education, a very sensitive and personal account, 'on the record'. At this point, I asked her if she wanted to change the topic or to pause the interview. She explained that she was happy to elaborate but did not want this disclosure to be recorded on my dictaphone. This support's Cohen et al.'s (2000) view that the presence of a tape recorder can in some cases leave participants alarmed or uneasy. I promptly paused the dictaphone while she elaborated. When she had finished giving her account of this case, I renegotiated verbal consent by asking her if she was happy for me to resume recording the interview. She agreed, and I shortly resumed recording. I also reminded her that we could stop the recording, the interview or both at any point, and that I would fully anonymise the data and securely store the audio and other related interview materials. This account reflected my efforts as a cooperative and sensitive interviewer.

One of the unforeseen challenges of interviewing parents was predicated precisely on just how 'networked' some home-educators are with one another. This rendered the preservation of anonymity and confidentiality an ongoing process throughout all the research phases. For example, during the telephone interviews with online moderators, issues surrounding loyalty, trust and risk emerged surfaced on two occasions.

First, what became clear in the early stages of interviewing online moderators is that they were typically established home-educators themselves. In most cases, they had assumed responsibility for moderating an email list because of their relations within various home-education communities offline. Thus, these participants were well known, active and trusted in the offline home-education world. At times, the topic of discussion between interviewer and interviewee revealed unanticipated tension between the loyalties and confidences of the home-educators that online moderators felt obliged to protect. For example, when discussing some of the more challenging aspects of home-education and/or difficulties that members of the group might have faced, there was sometimes an air of weariness at the possibility of describing examples in too much depth. Unforeseen situations such as these warranted the careful and sensitive reassurance of confidentiality. In these situations, I reminded participants they were free to say as much or as little as they wished and/or were free to move on to another question. The interview excerpt below exemplifies this (see Figure 3.6.1):

Figure 3.6.1: Telephone interview with online moderator excerpt

Probe: Could you tell me a bit more about that?

Response: Let's see, without contravening confidentiality … [*gives account*] I think I'm okay saying something about that but I really don't want to say anything else … to protect identities and things …

Confidentiality reassurance: Sure, no problem, I completely understand that … just to reassure you … everything will be anonymised and stored securely …

Response: I've carried out research and have written reports and have had to anonymise things myself, so I know … You do still have to be careful, you know, when you say to people, I will not break that confidence, so I need to make sure it doesn't break those confidences …

3.6.2 Parents as gatekeepers: consent from children

There is no one-size-fits-all ethical guidance for carrying out research that involves children. However, the methods in this research reflected my knowledge and commitment to a participatory rights perspective on research with children. This is a perspective that respects the wishes and agency needs of children and prioritises informed decision-making (Dockette and Perry 2011,

p.231). Greig and Taylor (1999) explained that "[c]hildren perceive and understand the work in a different way from adults, and whilst the research cannot for very obvious reasons, see the world from the child's perspective, acknowledging that their worlds are different is a sound starting point" (p.156). For these reasons, I developed researcher protocols that were sensitive to this difference, but I was also mindful of each child's own voice and their shared relationships with their parents (p.157). For instance, I adapted the information sheets to make them as easy to read and 'child-friendly' as possible. In cases where only parents consulted the information sheet, I made a considered and deliberate effort to explain my research to children present in the home (or other community settings) in a clear manner.

I was aware that the individual needs and wishes of children should be respected and harm should be avoided in conducting this research. During the family interviews in the home and/or in public community settings, parents featured as the gatekeepers who provided me with permission to approach their children and to negotiate with them their participation in research. "In some contexts gatekeepers provide a familiar and trusted mediator between participants and researchers" (Dockette and Perry 2011 p.238). Thus, parents gave their written and/or (where feasible) recorded verbal consent on behalf of themselves and their families (see Appx 11.6 for details). However, I did encounter a few issues with this approach to gaining informed consent and I draw on these experiences in the following sections.

3.6.3 Consent from young people

My presence as a researcher, rather than a home-educator/home-educated young person, was made visible to attendees through different procedures. First, I wore a name badge detailing my name, university and role at all times. I mounted an information poster and distributed contact cards at the information stand in the main tent at Summerfest. During my participation in workshops, I introduced myself as a doctoral student at Cardiff University. When the interviews with home-educated young people had finished, I offered business cards to all the participants and reiterated that if they and/or their parents had any questions regarding my research or their participation they could contact me by telephone or email.

3.6.4 Managing risk and harm

Deciding at Summerfest which home-educated young people to approach and where to approach them was difficult. This was because the nature of the festival setting meant that boundaries between public and personal spaces were at times blurred. I decided only to approach individuals when they were outside their tents, so as not to intrude on the personal spaces of teens and young people. At times, it was difficult to work as a lone researcher, because although I had a few

gatekeepers I still felt nervous about approaching groups of teenagers and young people. In particular, I noticed that males were generally outside their tents more, which is why I may have inadvertently spoken to more males than females.

All the interviews that I carried out at Summerfest were carried out in 'open spaces'. There was a designated teen tent area where groups of teens and home-educated young people collected in groups to sit and chat with one another. I also approached participants while they were congregated in the public eating areas near two of the pop-up cafes. However, I only did so when they had finished eating. Before approaching them, I introduced myself and asked them if I could sit down with them. I then proceeded to explain my research, in response to which several of them asked questions. In a few instances, I felt that these conversations turned into a process of justifying myself. For instance, one home-educated teen remarked 'Who is making you do this research? And are you doing it for the Government?', to which I replied that I was not trying to take sides but instead trying to gain an insight into their experiences.

One of the challenges I faced in relation to my researcher role was 'when to stop listening'. For example, I built rapport and socialised with the family camping next to me; although I chose not to interview them, one night while I was in my tent I heard them loudly discussing the reasons they had home-educated. It was hard because I felt as if I was inadvertently intruding on their otherwise private conversation. It also sparked off thoughts and reflections in my own mind, which made it difficult to mark when the role of researcher begins and ends in the field.

One of the difficulties of researching children and young people is that it can be a 'messy' process, particularly if conducted in a setting that is not easily controllable (Greig et al. 2013, p.174). Conducting group interviews with young people in the Summerfest setting brought about a unique set of challenges. First, I had little control over participation in and the structure of some interviews since some participants joined while the interview was taking place. At these points in our interview I paused the tape recorder and talked to these new participants about my research, giving them time to review my information poster before asking if they wished to participate. I also added that if they wished their contributions would not be included in the transcriptions and data collection of my work. On several occasions this led to several stops and starts during the interview. Conducting group interviews was challenging with respect to some individuals talking over others. When this occurred, I asked the participants who had yet to speak directly what they thought.

3.7   Researcher reflections: whose side am I on?

The dichotomy between insider an outsider, as used to describe the position between the researcher and researched, is a much more complex relation (Merriam et al. 2001). Rather, from the perspective of *positionality,* there are a range of different markers and relations such as age, ethnicity, class, gender, etc., that researchers can share (or not) with the communities that they are researching. Moreover, the positionality between researcher and researched is not static. There are times, for instance, when researchers may be more closely aligned to the perspectives, identities, etc., of their participants and other times when this is not the case. It is a relation that changes throughout the research process and continues in the analysis of research artefacts (Miriam et al. 2001). Therefore, an ongoing and retrospective reflection of my positionality within my own research was important. In the discussion below, I address this in relation to my researcher role.

3.7.1   Trust and access issues

Online moderators were the first contacts that I established in the field. Gaining the trust of these individuals was therefore pivotal to successful access to a significant number of other home-educators. I sent an email seeking their approval to circulate a link to my online survey. To offer transparency, I gave online moderators the opportunity to pilot the survey prior to setting the survey link as 'live'. Consequently, several online moderators contacted me with questions and/or comments prior to agreeing to circulate the 'live' link. These questions were largely focused on the format and presentation of some of my questions. However, in a few instances their responses indicated a degree of uncertainty or weariness about the authenticity of my intentions as a researcher. For example:

> I've looked at the questionnaire now and have some concerns … as so [home-education] community members I have shown this to. This looks like data gathering, rather than a qualitative approach. What do you intend to do with the information afterwards? As I am sure you are aware, as a small minority we are inundated with requests to do research and so I feel I have to ask for more info before deciding whether to forward this on …**(OM)**

I had originally established contact with the individual quoted above via Yahoo! groups. Interestingly, it emerged that my research was being discussed across some of the Facebook groups 'behind the scenes' as well. This was something that I had not fully anticipated would happen. In response to this feedback, I explained why it was important for me to try to gain access and sample as widely as possible for the interview stages of my research. In this correspondence, I also reiterated that my intentions as a researcher were not dubious or illegitimate. Sharing a link

to my Cardiff University academic profile was useful for proving my authenticity as a PhD student. Some of the other critical feedback that I received from online moderators concerned my use of the term 'home-schooling' somewhat interchangeably with the term 'home-education' in a few places on my information sheet and online survey. In an email, one online moderator explained that

> I must admit, I cringe at the term home-schooling because it implies that we do school at home … I don't think that you will be helpful for your research to use this … **(OM)**

This exchange highlights some of the tensions in researching a field characterised by partisanship. Crucially, this online moderator explained that to use the term 'home-schooling' would imply to home-educators that, as a researcher, I positioned home-education as synonymous with 'school'. Aware of the possible detrimental effects of this on the uptake of participants, I subsequently altered my survey and information sheets to reflect this advice. However, it transpired in several of my interviews that several of the home-educators used 'home-schooling' rather than 'home-education' to refer to their practice. This perhaps further light on how the terrain of home-education is inherently contested and how adopting one term over another is construed among communities as an expression of the 'side' you are on as a researcher. I discuss the effects of partisanship at length in the next chapter (*Chapter four*). Here, it is worth highlighting that the inevitability of assuming 'a side' in this research field can be difficult to navigate.

One online moderator requested that I telephone her for an informal discussion before she would agree to circulate the link. During this conversation, I explained in greater depth and justify my reasons for pursuing this research. Breaking the ice and building a rapport with online moderators through these exchanges was important for legitimacy as an 'outsider' seeking access to home-education groups. However, not all the initial reactions were negative. In one email, for instance, an online moderator remarked that

> If you needed any other help with this I'd be really happy to help, or to point you towards others who might be able to help further … It's great that you are doing this research!..**(OM)**

Negotiating access formally was relatively straightforward. I emailed the organisers of Summerfest and asked if I could attend as an overt researcher. I paid the fee of a normal attendee and we agreed that I would put up a poster and leave business cards in the main tent. However, when I arrived I found that I was met with some hostility. In the information office, one of the organisers told me that some researchers simply disregard how their research could impact the community. In response to this, I could only reiterate that my intentions were good and that I was interested in a range of perspectives and ideas, rather than positioning home-education as 'good' or 'bad'. In this moment, I felt that I was almost expected to position myself as an ally whose research outcomes would be 'good' for the community. Instead, I tried to give a balanced response and

reassured the organisers that I would follow ethical protocol and ensure that I was not 'encroaching' on the private spaces of potential participants. After our discussion, this organiser warmed to me slightly, but I did continue to sense an air of discomfort at my being there as a researcher who was not home-educated. Interestingly, based on my general conversations I found that several of the young people attending Summerfest were not home-educated themselves but had been invited through a friend who was or had been.

Understandably, the online moderators of groups manage spaces that could potentially be used by a range of different home-educators with a diverse collection of interests. In the piloting stages of my online survey, one online moderator explained how my reference to the term 'home-schooling', rather than home-education, would inevitably damage my research efforts as I would appear to be siding with the view that home-education should look like school. Operationalising this term, she explained, would apparently lead home-educators to question my authenticity and legitimacy as a researcher. Interestingly, what became apparent is that several home-educated children and parents themselves referred to the practice as 'home-schooling' rather than home-education. This shows how contested terminology is even inside home-education groups, let alone among researchers of the topic.

3.7.2   Positionality

As other researchers of home-education have also found (see Nelson 2013), my identity as a 'non-threatening' female helped in the process of establishing rapport and in gaining the trust of my participants. In the Summerfest setting, I found that my 5'1" stature and age acted as a source of commonality between myself and the young people interviewed. At this stage, arguably my positionality was more closely aligned to that of my participants.

I also found that camping on-site in and among home-educators was helpful for fostering a sense of shared experience and commonality between myself (an outsider) and home-educators (insiders). Denzin (2006) explains that "the observer must, to the extent of his abilities, learn to view the world of his subjects from their perspective. Preconceptions and stereotypes must be forsaken; a flexible and relativistic stance must be adopted" (p.365). The response from participants when I told them I was camping gave me the impression that they valued the fact that I was 'sticking it out' in the muddy field with them and that I was therefore committed. My visible presence at Summerfest might have helped to dispel any implicit preconceptions of my values and intentions as researcher of home-education. It also offered a unique opportunity to socialise with home-education families in natural and informal manner. This provided a unique insight that would have otherwise been difficult to obtain through family and parent interviews.

Although the 'research act' (Denzin 1970) may be carefully choreographed, the researcher is nevertheless vulnerable to mistakes, confusions and uncertainty. Entertaining questions such as 'have I disclosed too much'? or 'am I dressed appropriately?' are all processes that constitute the achievement of the researcher-self (Scot et al. 2012). Although my researcher role was overt during the participant observation, I was unsure of the degree to which I should wear formal or informal clothing. I was torn between dressing professionally, conscious of the fact that I did not want to appear to be a home-educated young person myself, but at the same time I did not want to appear to be too much of a stranger.

The challenges associated with a 'reluctant respondent' have been given greater scholarly attention issues regarding researcher's subjectivity and actions within a social encounter (Scot et al. 2012). Scot et al. 2012 argued that a researcher is positioned as a neutral or emotionally devoid static being, doing all that they can to ease the anxieties of their interviewee.

However, in her research involving 'boy racers' situated in the position of underdogs, Lumsden (2012) found that in her attempts to avoid enforcing bias by remaining sympathetic and impartial, she inadvertently prioritised the perspectives of racers over the other participants in her study. Lumsden (2001) argued that complete value neutrality is impossible, but that it requires reflexivity on the part of the researcher to identify the implicit and explicit assumptions to underpin decision-making in research.

As participants, had given up their time, there was a natural expectation that I would offer something of myself or my time to the adults that I spoke to. Meeting the 'norm of reciprocity' (Williamson 1996) meant that it was difficult to simply get up and leave a participant's home shortly after I had turned the voice recorder off. Interestingly, this was especially apparent during the informal interviews with young people at Summerfest. For instance, towards the end of our conversations it was common for young people to ask what my experience of school was, and/or whether I would home-educate my children. When responding to these sorts of questions, I wrestled with the dilemmas of authenticity and the presentation of my researcher self. In answering these questions, I tried to assimilate a range of views articulated by the participants that I had interviewed previously to construct a balanced view, which was typically along the lines of:

> Well, it would depend on the circumstances I found myself in, and while I can appreciate that many young people such as yourself are happy and well, equally I know that some children might find home-education hard in other ways, i.e. accessing educational qualifications…**(Researcher).**

At times, it was difficult to deflect questions that elicited an expression of my views on home-education while at the same time addressing interviewee questions in a balanced and meaningful

way. At times, I replied "Well, I am interested more in your experiences and perspectives than in my own". On other occasions, I drew on my understanding and formative knowledge, suggesting that there were merits but also challenges that home-educating families faced.

As discussed earlier, at the beginning of all the interviews I took a good deal of time to explain my research to participants and to highlight my ambitions to gain a data-driven and balanced insight of the topic. However, like Lumsdens' (2012) experience, during my first few interviews with parents I sometimes found myself being perhaps overly sympathetic to what some might regard as 'extreme' points of view. There were two moments when I had to clarify my intention to fairly, yet objectively, represent the voices of home-educating parents (see extracts below). Notably, these two parents had implicitly interpreted this project as one that would contribute to the advocacy of home-education:

> [H]ome-education is often a target for those who feel that the state should control all aspects of people's lives … But I think that there is just such a strong research base emerging that is of a huge benefit to those who do adopt home-education, so work like yours, Amber … is really helpful to our community… **(Home-educator)**

> The political tensions surrounding home-education mean we need to explore how we fight and how we maintain our freedom to do so in future. So that's why research like yours, Amber, is very important…. **(Home-educator)**

I reflect further on my role as an outsider on the 'peripheries' of home-education, and on how I gave voice to the accounts of my participants, in Section 3.9.3.

3.8 Data cohorts

At the point of exiting the field, I had gathered 242 survey responses and 52 interviews with 85 participants; which amounted to 56 hours, 36 minutes of recorded qualitative data. This did not include the notes amassed during my time spent at Summerfest. In the tables below, I outline the data set cohorts obtained across the four main phases of data collection that I have described in the sections above (see Section 3.3.4).

3.8.1 Cohort 1: Survey respondents

Table 3.8.1 I: UK home-educators

I am a parent / carer currently home-educating in the UK	**242 (100%)**
I agree to take part in this study	**242**

Table 3.8.1 II: Gender

Gender	Male	Female
Total (N=241)	5	236

Table 3.8.1 III: Ethnic groups

Ethnic groups (aggregate)	Total (N=238)
White/White British	226
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	4
Asian/Asian British	4
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	2
Other ethnic group	2

Table 3.8.1 IV: Country of residence

Country / province of UK residence	England	Wales	Scotland
Total (N=240)	223	15	2

3.8.2 Cohort 2: Online moderators interviewed

Table 3.8.2: Online moderators interviewed

Interview	Pseudonym	Medium	Group moderated[21]	Duration
1.	Sharon	Email	Regional Yahoo! group	N/A
2.	Becky	Telephone	National Yahoo! groups	02:23
3.	Sam	Telephone	Local Yahoo! group	00:57
4.	Lorraine	Telephone	Local Facebook group	01:12
5.	Gwen	Village hall	Local Yahoo! group	00:42
6.	Georgina	Telephone	Local Yahoo! group	00:56
7.	Patricia	Telephone	Regional & local Yahoo! groups	00:55
8.	Claudia	Telephone	Local Facebook group	00:53
9.	Alexa	Telephone	Local Yahoo! group	01:17
10.	Christie	Telephone	Local Facebook group	00:42
11.	Elaine	Telephone	Regional Yahoo! groups	01:19
12.	Theresa	Participant's home	Local Facebook group	01:25

---

[21] I have omitted the areas of within which these participants reside, in addition to the specific names of the online groups moderated, to preserve the anonymity of these participants. In particular, some of the Yahoo! groups and moderators are well known in the online world of home-education and it would have been easy to search for and find the online Yahoo! or Facebook group in question and to therefore to be able to contact and/or identify the online moderator had this information not been omitted. Arguably, this would have increased the potential risk of harming the relationships and trust that exists between and among some of the home-educators and families sampled in this research.

3.8.3 Cohort 3: Home-educating families: parents and children interviewed

Table 3.8.3: Home-educating families: parents and children interviewed

Interview	Pseudonym	Medium	Region of residence	Duration
13.	Simone	Community centre	London	01:75
14.	Kim	Telephone	Yorkshire & the Humber	01:07
15.	Rosa & sons	Public library	London	00:48
16.	Fiona	Participant's home	South West England	01:25
17.	Debbie	Email	East Midlands	N/A
18.	Kirsten	Skype chat	East of England	01:15
19.	Grace	Participant's home	West Midlands	02:16
20.	Jenny	Telephone	East of England	02:00
21.	Susannah & son	Community centre	South East England	01:22
22.	Rhiannon	Participant's home	South East England	0:45
23.	Abbey	Telephone	South of Scotland	01:14
24.	Iona	Village hall	South East England	01:13
25.	Elsa and daughter	Coffee shop	West Midlands	01:17
26.	Hayleigh	Telephone	East Midlands	00:58
27.	Beth	Telephone	North West England	00:54
28.	Sandra and family	Participant's home	South West England	01:03
29.	Harriet	Participant's home	South East England	00:57
30.	Naomi & family	Restaurant	South Wales	01:16
31.	Nicky & sons	Participant's home	South East England	01:28
32.	Gail & daughter	Participant's home	South East England	01:30
33.	Esther	Community centre	London	00:56
34.	Gemma	Telephone	East Midlands	01:18
35.	Trish	Telephone	North West England	01:01
36.	Cerian & family	Participant's home	West Wales	01:36
37.	Vicky	Village hall	London	00:43
38.	Laurie	Community centre	South East England	00:57
39.	Holly	Participant's home	South East England	00:48
40.	Verity & Monica	Community centre	South West England	00:45

41	Liv	Summerfest	South East England	00:43
42.	Ryan	Summerfest	South East England	01:02
43.	Nadine	Summerfest	East of England	00:41
44.	Irene & son	Summerfest	London	01:57

3.8.4 Cohort 4: Home-educated young people interviewed

Table 3.8.4: Home-educated young people interviewed

Interview	Pseudonyms	Medium	Duration
45.	Steven (15 yrs) Cole (16 yrs) Evan (14 yrs)	Summerfest	00:23
46.	Willow (15 yrs) Josh (16 yrs) Ava (15 yrs)	Summerfest	00:40
47.	Martin (14 yrs) Tom (16 yrs) Jude (15 yrs)	Summerfest	00:35
48.	Bryon (16 yrs) Tim (14 yrs)	Summerfest	00:55
49.	Josh (15 yrs) Joe (16 yrs) Laura (16 yrs)	Summerfest	00:45
50.	Todd (15 yrs) Dylan (16 yrs) Ellen (16 yrs) Flo (17 yrs)	Summerfest	01:06
51.	Billie (16 yrs) Stephanie (19 yrs) Tara (15 yrs)	Summerfest	00:40
52.	Julia (20 yrs) Peter (19 yrs)	Summerfest	00:48

3.9 Analysing mixed methods research

In this study, the process of interpreting relevant issues and themes occurred, albeit implicitly, throughout each data collection phase. Even before data collection began, the themes and ideas generated from reading around the topic could be viewed as a distinct method of analysis. This therefore supports what Atkinson and Coffey (1996) view as the artificial divide between data

gathering and analysis. However, there was a marked moment in the research processes where data collection was no longer my focal activity and this remainder of this chapter concentrates on the activities undertaken immediately after this period.

In Section 3.3. of this chapter, I discussed some of the potential pitfalls regarding the use of mixed methods research. Specifically, I highlighted the need for transparency in the reporting of strategies and procedures used to 'combine', 'integrate' and/or 'mix' quantitative and qualitative data. In the discussion that follows, I therefore describe the analytical strategy and procedures used in this study.

In this analysis of mixed methods, the quantitative data collected was positioned a 'scaffolding' or backdrop; that served to challenge or support what was "a qualitatively dominant mixed-method analysis" (Onwuegbuzie and Combs 2011). Thus, the quantitative data played a complementary role in what was primarily a qualitatively driven analytical strategy (see Section 3.3). In adopting the analytical approach that I did, I intended to situate the relations between the subjective experiences of home-educators, children and young people within the wider social groups, networks and communities that they participated in. Combining the data in this way, arguably enhanced the explanatory power of the findings. Figure 3.9 provides and overview of the successive stages in the analysis and at what points the integration occurred (see below):

Figure 3.9: Combining mixed methods data

Online survey data

Output explored to SPSS & Microsoft Excel

Open-ended questions merged to QSR Nvivo project

Visualisation of survey data set: Graphs and data tables created

Cross checking themes with survey data

Interview data

Data retrieved and uploaded to QSR Nvivo

Data transcribed sequentially by interview group:

1. Online moderators

2. Home educators, families and children

3. Home -educated young people

Transcripts uploaded to QSR NVivo

Thematic analysis

Themes merged across data cohorts

Development of thesis narrative

Building a conceptual framework to support thesis narrative

Re-ordering thesis narrative & refinement of themes

Final drafting

Writing up: early draft chapters

Closed coding: selecting illustrative cases for presentation of findings

Figure 3.9 represents a point when, during the early stages of the analysis, I used some of the closed ended survey questions to check the prevalence of emerging patterns and ideas. Moreover, when I merged themes across interviewee groups, I used the open ended qualitative survey responses to explore the breadth of a issues or topics that emerged in the smaller interviewee cohort. As an example, in exploring the rationales for home-education, I used the survey to cross-check the breadth of reasons for home-education. Both forms of data were coded together in NVivo 10. For more detailed account of the thematic coding techniques used, please see Section 3.9.2. In this way, the survey data was used to obtain a broader representation of the interests and needs of both survey respondents and interviewees. Furthermore, during the later stages of analysis, when my coding techniques shifted from more open to closed methods (see Section 3.9.2), I used the quantitative survey data to explore the occupational groups and educational qualifications of

the survey respondents to support my analysis of the sources of distinction and similarity between different families.

3.9.1 Transcription and coding

Due to the relatively narrow time-frame within which I collected my data, nearly all the transcription was carried out when I had physically exited the field. I transcribed the interviews sequentially and in the following order:

i.   Online moderators;
ii. Home-educators & families;
iii. Home-educated young people.

To assist with the transcription process, I used a piece of software called *Dragon Naturally Speaking* by the company called *Nuance*[22]. Equipped with a headset and a foot pedal, the practicalities involved listening to the audio recordings, pausing and resuming playback, while simultaneously dictating, verbatim, into a microphone (this was quickly converted to text). This significantly the time it took to transcribe 56 hours and 36 minutes' worth of interview data. However, the transcription software used was not without fault. Despite purporting a 95% level of accuracy, I found myself correcting minor, but never the less, frequent errors.

During this research, I kept a research journal. I frequently used it to document my thoughts on the interviews I listened too. Reflecting on the process of transcription, I noticed what Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) described as a 're-awakening' of the interview process. The exert below demonstrates this:

> *When I read the sentences in front of me, I recall the accents and faces of the participants that I have spoken too...The sentences trigger my memory of their homes, their children...[f]or a moment I caught a glimpse into their lives. I listened to their thoughts, their experiences…Over the phone, I was a listening ear…a break for busy parents in-between bathing children, cooking dinner and watching dragons den. Seeing the data before me, it somehow seems so detached in this new textual form* **(Research journal entry, 26/08/2014).**

The exert above captures my aversion to the transformation of a transient and co-constructed social encounter into a one-way abstraction that became permanent in written form (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015, p.203).

When approaching the thematic coding, I was aware of Coffey and Atkinson's (1996) reminder that the process should be carried out with a great deal of rigour and care. Thus, the first reading of the

---

[22] For further information, see: http://www.nuance.co.uk/dragon/index.htm

interview data was 'low' level. Using NVivo, I made highly descriptive annotations and memos for each transcript one interview group at a time. This meant that I complied separate annotations and memos for online moderators, home-educators/families and home-educated young people. Before merging themes, I did not want to lose important differences and similarities across the data cohorts. Arguably, the steps taken facilitated the acquisition of a more dynamic interpretation of how themes, such as 'identity', were narrated is distinct ways across groups.

As the analysis progressed, I drew on Delamont's (1992) advice and looked for cross-cutting patterns between themes. I also compared the cases which challenged or supported the themes that began to emerge across multiple data cohorts. After first, this process was carried separately across each interview group, later data was merged. Table 3.9.1 below exemplifies this process

Table 3.9.1: the generation of codes

Interview data	+ Survey data	= *Interpretation*
The home-educated learner • Ethical • True self • Happiness • Nurture • Independence **Qualitative Interview themes**	Parental occupational groups -Higher than average Goals for home education -Parents prioritise being independent over qualifications **Quantitative Survey trends**	Shared aims/project for home education -The goals for home education are connected to the social positions and cultural resources of parents. -Home education was framed as something enriching and holistic.
Source: Interview themes (parents, children & young people combined)	**Source:** Closed and open-ended survey data	**Source:** notes & memos
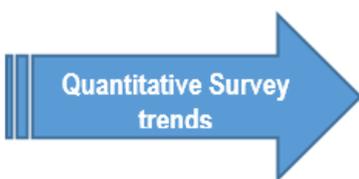
In the move towards closed coding, I assumed an 'adaptive approach' (Layder 1998) to the task of organising, structuring and indexing the interview and observation data obtained from the research. This involved an integration of both inductive and deductive processes for the development of a coding structure.

When the entire data set had been fully and coded, the narrative for this thesis began to emerge. In early drafts of my empirical chapters, I was faced with a host of different themes to pursue at face-value. The development and application of my conceptual toolkit (see *Chapter four*) was pivotal for extending and refining the story this narrative. However, here it is important to recognise

that certain avenues where left less explored than others in later stage of my analysis. The role of interpretation and representation is discussed in greater detail in section 3.9.3.

3.9.2 Confidentiality: data storage and anonymity

Throughout this research, I took the confidentiality of all the participants seriously. When my survey was closed, I exported the responses from *Qualtrics* (an online survey software package) to SPSS and Microsoft Excel. In these two programmes, I deleted all the personal email addresses that were disclosed by 120 participants. Moreover, I also removed any groups names that were recorded in the survey responses. Due to the ease within which many of the groups could be identified and contacted, I chose to exclude the names any affiliated home-education group or organisation (with the acceptation of Education Otherwise) completely from my data set. It is worth mentioning here that in *Chapter five*, where I provide titles and information pages for some Yahoo! and Facebook groups, publicly available information obtained from a random selection of unaffiliated groups was used. These examples were selected based on their broad similarity to the actual groups sampled in this study. However, key information in the titles and information pages of the 'hypothetical' cases was altered to avoid the inadvertent risk of intrusion and/or or a breach in privacy. Finally, after any sensitive information that could connect case with a response, the survey dataset was then saved stored securely on my personal laptop and on my Dropbox account, both of which are password protected.

In the sampling information and interview transcripts of online moderators, I replaced the specific groups' names to generically reflect the size and population level these intended to support. This included: 'national[23]', 'regional[24]' and 'local[25]'. These replacement descriptors were intentionally vague and generic. It was a challenge to capture the nuanced characteristics of the Yahoo! and Facebook groups sampled in this research while simultaneous ensuring that the pseudonyms and descriptions of these groups were changed and altered enough to ensure confidentiality. I found that in making these alterations and exclusions, in obscured what a dynamic and complex landscape of communities and networks. Striking a balance between being overly descriptive and

---

[23] *National groups* were the largest of groups- regarding the numbers of registered members. The title and information pages of these groups suggested that they typically supported the entire UK population of home-educators.
[24] *Regional groups* were medium sized. The title and information pages of these groups indicated that they were likely to support networks of family's offline- who lived across multiple counties, regions and/or Cities.
[25] *Local groups* were the smallest groups that featured in the sample. The title and information pages commonly indicated that these online spaces intended to support communities of home-educators and home-educating families who lived in close proximity to one and another.

potentially removing anonymity within a highly networked community and saying too little was challenging.

After the interviews were transcribed, all the original audio recordings were deleted from my dictaphone alongside email correspondence and email addresses. Furthermore, where I had obtained written consent from participants, I stored these papers in lockable storage. All the names of my interview participants were replaced with pseudonyms. I had kept a record for the purposes of linking survey responses to most interview participants. Once I had located and paired these, I erased this information. Additionally, any reference to place names were altered to reflect general regions i.e. 'South West England'. Any specific reference to the names of any home-education networks and communities (both online and offline) was also removed. As with the survey dataset, I stored the 52 interview transcripts securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

3.9.3 Interpretation and representation

> Most fundamentally analysis is about representation or reconstruction of the social phenomena…we do not simply "collect" data; we fashion them out of our transactions with other men and women. Likewise, we do not merely report what we find; we create accounts of social life, and in doing so construct versions of the social world and social actors that we observe. It is, therefore, inescapable that analysis implies representation (Coffey and Atkinson 1996, p.108).

In the age of the reflexive tern (Silverman 2011), the challenges of researching marginal groups are always not given sufficient consideration by researchers. Managing power relations, and the needs and interests between researcher and researched is a complex task. As the words of Coffey and Adkins (2004) (see paragraph above) demonstrate, the values and assumptions of researchers unequivocally shape relations, decisions and interpretations of the subject under study.

In this section I reflect on the challenges that I experienced in interpreting the voices of my participants in a field marked by partisanship. I also discuss how I represented home-educating families and communities from a peripheral position (discussed in Section 3.7.2)

As a researcher working in the field of home-education, my intention was to produce a more objective and balanced reading of the field. However, various challenges of the research process elicited an internal struggle that became particularly apparent during the analysis process- when I was afforded with space and time away to reflect on the data that I had collected. My research journal helped me to reflect on the ways in which my interpretation shaped, and was shaped by the stories of my participants. As an example:

> *The process of transcription for has made me think not only about what certain elements of my data might mean, but also how these ideas fit with my own understanding of*

education...Maybe I have been spoon-fed and brought up to believe that educational qualifications mean everything! … **(Research journal entry: 18/09/2014).**

Throughout, I was very aware of my responsibility as a researcher to remain true to the sentiment and perspectives of participants. However, the volume of the materials amassed during research, meant that it was impossible to present long extracts of talk transcribed from all the 55 interviews in this thesis. I found the selecting a sub -sample of interview quotations and other illustrative data particularly difficult. When deciding what to 'show' in my findings chapters, I sought to represent the diverse range of experiences and perspectives of all the parents, children and young people who participated in this research. Moreover, I approached this act in a sensitive and balanced way- particularly when portraying contested topics such as the *Badman Review (2009)* (see *Chapter two* for a recap).

3.10 Limitations and summary

The methods techniques and analytical procedures used in the research have shaped what this thesis can and cannot say about home-education. First, this study is not representative of the UK, British, or even the English home-educating population. However, with a focus on communities and networks, and the application of a mid-range theoretical framework (see *Chapter four*), I sought to represent some of the structures and relations to exist among home-educators and home-educated learners who use new technologies.

The existence of a possible digital divide in home-education, means that the sample might be biased toward families who have access to the internet (see Section 2.8). Additionally, the use of online groups to access this research population, means that the sample obtained reflects home-educators who are members of, and frequently participate in said groups. For these reasons, I caution against drawing any sweeping generalisations about the broader home-education population in Britain. As was discussed in *Chapter two*, moving away from conjecture will help to extend the field of home-education research. I reflect further on the limitations of this research further in *Chapter nine*.

To summarise, in this chapter, I have described the mixed methods approach and data collection tools used to generate the empirical data featured in this study. I have outlined some of the challenges and limitations of accessing a population via online networks and the implications of this for the representativeness of the sample. Moreover, the ethical issues encountered and steps taken to manage risk and harm were also discussed. I also drew attention to the positionality of the researcher, situated on the peripheries of home-education communities, and the importance of reflexivity and trust in this process. A summary of the data cohorts was also presented.

Furthermore, the procedures used for managing mixed methods data and how I approached and developed its analysis were also discussed. In *Chapter four*, I describe the collection of theoretical concepts used to interpret my findings.

Chapter 4 : Conceptual toolkit

4.1 Introduction

This thesis is predominantly an empirically driven study. However, several key concepts shaped how the data are analysed and is presented in the findings chapters (*Chapters five–eight*). The construction of this toolkit was an iterative process that emerged towards the later stages of analysis and writing up. This chapter describes how the process of theory building was approached in this study. Specifically, I set out how and why theories of learning from a practice-based perspective (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) and Bernsteinian (1975a;1975b; 2000) ideas were woven together with social capital theory (Bourdieu 1986) to interpret the role of new technologies, communities and networks in home-education. I then moved on to consider the merits and deficits of adopting this analytical approach.

4.2 Putting theory to work

There are many perspectives on how a conceptual framework should be developed and when in the research process this should take place (Leshem and Trafford 2007). Scholars such as Jabareen (2009), argue that conceptual framework analysis is as a distinct method of research. However, for the purposes of explaining my approach, Jabareen's (2009) definition of a conceptual framework is particularly insightful:

> "A network, or a "plane", of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena. The concepts that constitute a conceptual framework support one another, articulate their respective phenomena, and establish a framework-specific philosophy" (p. 51).

Following the thematic analysis of my data, I was in search of a framework capable of describing both the participation, structures and relations between home-educators who participated in online networks and communities offline. I also sought to describe the experiences, knowledge and identities of the members' whose participation mutually constituted these social organisations.

In the selection and application of concepts, I was acutely aware that theoretically constructs should function as "tools for researchers to use rather than totems for them to worship" (Weaver-Hart 1998, p. 11). A strategy of borrowing whatever concepts and language most useful to the generation of new discourse on home-education was used (Pattison 2015). I did not, therefore, impose an overarching theoretical perspective, but instead applied an eclectic mix of concepts to explain the themes that initially emerged from earlier stages of data analysis (see *Chapter three*).

Importantly, every concept has a history and a unique methodological mooring (Nelson 2014). I fully acknowledge that the selection and application of my conceptual framework evokes a unique epistemological and ontological orientation towards not only my data, but the very foundations of my research inquiry. As it will become clear in the following discussion, the analytical tools that I came to use were rooted in social constructivist theory. Broadly, social constructivism is a perspective that maintains that knowledge is produced and exists in the social interactions of groups. Knowledge is therefore situated in the experiences and identities created because of co-constructed exchanges between individuals (Wenger 1998). Within this broad church, there were theorists whose ideas were highly influential to the language and style of the story told in the findings of this thesis. Table 4.2 briefly outlines all the key concepts used:

Table 4.2: Key concepts used

Communities of Practice and social learning systems theory
Lave and Wenger (1991):
Legitimate peripheral participation and social learning theory
Wenger (1998; 2010):
Joint enterprise
Boundary
Domains
Brokers/boundary managers
Repertoires, artefacts
Legitimate/illegitimate participants
Engagement, imagination and alignment
Participation/reification and meaning making
Identity trajectories and allegiance
Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015):
A landscape of practice
Educational transmissions and social production theory
Bernstein (1975a; 1975b; 2000):
Pedagogic text
Expressive and restricted code
The field of generation, contextualisation and reproduction
Invisible and visible pedagogy
Classification and framing
Social capital theory

Bourdieu (1969):

Cultural capital, economic capital and social capital

Embodied state

Symbolic struggles

Putnam (2000):

Bridging and bonding capital

Other concepts

Ball (2003); Vincent and Ball (2006):

Middle class strategies: push and pull factors

Merton (1936); Giddens (1991):

Unintended consequences

Lareau (2003) and Vincent and Maxwell (2016):

Concerted cultivation and cultural enrichment

Thus far, I have briefly outlined the ways in which I put theory to work in this thesis. I have also alluded to the broader social constructivist moorings of this study. In the remainder of this chapter, I outline the theories cited in Table 4.2, paying close attention to concepts that were used to describe the data presented in *Chapters five–eight.*

4.3   Defining networks and communities

As the title suggests, this thesis is about new technologies, knowledge, networks and communities in home-education. My first task, therefore, is to explain they ways in which I have interpreted the term *community* and how this differs from a *network*.

With the proliferation of new technologies and social media, the parameters of what constitute a *community* or a *network* is a complex and contested field of scholarship. In my undergraduate dissertation: *Virtually telling stories: cyber-sociality and governmentality in Second Life*, I spent a significant amount of time grappling with what *community* in the presence of internet technologies might mean.

Baym (2010) noted that some scholars would consider geographical proximity as an essential precursor for the formation of close, primary social bonds (Chayko 2008, p 6., cited in Baym 2010, p.74). Thus, space in a physical and metaphorical sense is an important component in these debates. Drawing on the findings of her research, Baym (2010) observed that "[m]ost online groups are not so tied to geographical space, yet people who are involved in online groups think of them as shared places" (p.75).

On the other hand, Brown and Duguid (2000) suggested that Networks of Practice (NoPs), for example, are characterised by looser structures and weaker social ties. With the advent of social networking sites, broadly social networks refer to the connections and dynamic organisation of groups who might not share close geographical proximity. To add to this complexity, however, networks can also function as a social linkage and tool for community development. As White (2004) observed:

> Networks trigger the formation of a distinct group of willing and interested people. This may be a core of geographically co-located people or a wider distributed network of resource folk (p.292).

Crucially, my interpretation of *community* and *network* is rooted in a social practice perspective (Lave and Wenger 1991). As I will explain, I viewed the constructs of *community* and *networks* primarily as social learning systems (this is discussed further in Section 4.3.2). This perspective was less concerned with the geographical proximity and strength of social ties fostered between members. Instead, it placed greater emphasis on the ways in which groups engaged with and learned from one another and, in doing so, co-constructed an understanding of what they do, who they are and where they belong.

Thus, although I used concepts from the CoP model, my approach did not attempt to model Yahoo! and Facebook groups as specific *networks* or *communities*, but, rather, sought to understand how they facilitated the social practices of participants who used them. In doing so, I concentrated on how knowledge was shaped and exchanged by home-educators online and the ways in which this knowledge was used in pursuit of an alternative in education. I will use the term *online networks* to refer to the online interactions, and *community* to emphasise offline communication, though these do not refer to specific models.

4.4   Social learning systems

Social learning systems theory was an important body of knowledge that I worked with in this thesis. More specifically, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) framework of a *Landscape of Practice* (LoP) and Wenger's (1998) model of a *Community of Practice* (CoP) were of importance in the interpretation of my data. The discussion that follows, therefore, is an account of the interrelated concepts from a practice-based learning perspective that were put to work in this thesis. Specifically, I focus on the origins, underlying assumptions and social processes that characterise my interpretation of *learning*, *identity* and *belonging* narrated in the findings (see *Chapters seven and eight*).

4.4.1 The Communities of Practice model

From my review of the literature, I was aware that Safran (2008 & 2010) had used Wenger's (1998) original Communities of Practice framework to make sense of the participation in neighbourhood groups by 'experienced' home-educators (see *Chapter two*). Coupled with the nature of my research inquiry, the Communities of Practice model was therefore my first port of call in the development of my conceptual toolkit.

The term CoP was originally coined in Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. In their work, Lave and Wenger conceptualised a kind of social learning that they called *legitimate peripheral participation* (p.29). Legitimate peripheral participation describes the process by which members participate in communities of practitioners who share common interests, goals and histories. Through participating in these communities, members undertake activities and, in doing so, generate artefacts and knowledge of the community to which they belong.

Lave and Wenger's (1991) ideas were underpinned by the perspective that learning is a socially constructed and, thus, a fundamentally *situated activity*. Learning therefore involves acquiring identities that reflect both how a learner sees the world and how the world sees the learner. Learning is anything but a simple job, then: it "is a complex social process, one that cannot simply be captured in the notion that all learning takes place inside individual human heads" (Simon 1991, p.125, cited in Brown and Duguid 2000). Such a claim does not deny the integrity of the individual. It accepts, however, that *what* individuals learn always and inevitably reflects the social context *within* which they learn.

Wenger (1998) went on to significantly develop the CoP model in his seminal work *Communities of Practice: learning, meaning and identity*. Crucially, a Community of Practice refers to a distinct type of social organisation with three main characteristics that distinguish it from other kinds of learning systems. According to Wenger (1998), these include i) *joint enterprise*, ii) *mutual engagement* and iii) *shared repertoire*.

Broadly, *joint enterprise* refers to the common goal, which shapes the efforts of a CoP. Crucially, the *joint enterprise* (or common goals) might never be explicitly defined by the CoP. Additionally, because members continually negotiate and re-negotiated the enterprise of a CoP might change across time. To add to this complexity, the ways in which a CoP might define their *joint enterprise* is also shaped by the CoP's position within the broader landscape of other learning systems and organisations (Wenger 1998).

Wegner (1998) theorised that as we interact within a group, share stories and exchange conversation for example, we attribute meaning to our experiences. Thus, engaging in activities in the pursuit of our enterprise is not just about the technicalities of doing something for the sake of it, but rather the meanings we produce in doing is what matters. In this way, meaning is a process which is produced in an experience. Wegner (1998) argues that meaning is therefore something inherently located in process of *negotiation*.

For a CoP to exist, it should demonstrate the mutual engagement of its participants. One element of mutual engagement refers to the practice of doing things together. Not only are participants required to directly interact with one another in a CoP, but this interaction forms a "network of interpersonal relations through which information flows" (Wenger 1998, p.74).

Engagement in social contexts involves a dual process of meaning making. On the one hand, we engage directly in activities, conversations, reflection, and other forms of *participation* in social life. On the other hand, we produce physical and conceptual *artifacts* – words, tools, concepts, methods, stories, documents, links to resources, and other forms of *reification* – that reflect our shared experience and around which we organise our participation (Wenger 2010, p.1).

This set of dense relations is organised around what the group is there to do (*joint enterprise*). For a family, this could include "taking trips on the weekends, or cleaning the house on Saturdays" (Wenger 1998, p.74). The existence of mutual engagement is therefore traceable in the relationships, coordination, discussion and planned activities that enable a sense of coherence within a group. In the process of meaning making, members of CoPs engage in what Wenger (2010) identified as *participation* and *reification*. Over time, this evolves to become "an informal and dynamic social structure among the participants and this is what a community of practice is" (Wenger 2010, p.2).

However, Wenger (1998) asserted that this does not mean that the members of a CoP should possess the same interests, values, beliefs and aspirations. Using the example of claims processors, Wenger (1998) explained that, despite the differences between participants and the levels of significance that they attributed to their role of being a claims processor, working together and establishing a shared way of doing things (p.75). As members jointly engage in actions, they negotiate the meaning of these actions with one another (Oreszczyn et al. 2010). In this way, mutual engagement necessitates 'complementary' and 'overlapping' forms of competence to enable mutual engagement. At the same time, this can simultaneously produce diversity and homogeneity between members (Wenger 1998).

Wenger (1998) suggested that geographical proximity can help in facilitating mutual engagement; however, it is not an essential component. Within the 'right context', he asserted, "talking over the phone, or exchanging electronic email can be considered part of what makes mutual engagement possible" (Wenger 1998, p.74). However, one of the ambiguities in this assertion is how one would define *mutual engagement* via electronic email. In the first instance, does reading an email or 'liking' a Facebook post constitute 'mutual engagement'? Secondly, how many members within the CoP are required to send emails and reply to each other to constitute the engagement of the majority? Further, although CoPs are required to possess a central domain where all members can communicate, it is unclear if this domain necessitates face-to-face interaction to which the use of electronic email is merely an extension.

CoPs can exist across many spheres of life, including at home, in schools, in workplaces, in sporting contexts and beyond. Given the multiple spheres that they inhabit, CoPs are sometimes so pervasive that they are hard to identify (Cox 2005). As Occhino et al. (2013) explained, "[s]ome CoPs are named, others are not, and they can be structured, formal or informal" (p.91). According to Wenger (1998), we belong to many Communities of Practice across our lifetimes. Consequently, Brown and Duguid (2001) stated that the CoP model is useful for capturing learning, knowledge, work and identity formation. Members of such groups collectively develop an outlook on work and the world that may reflect the organisation but will most intensely reflect the local community.

Research using the CoP model has formed what is now a vast topic of scholarship (Koilba and Gajda 2009). Notably, the proliferation of news bulletin boards, social media and other social networking platforms has informed the extension of the CoP model (Wenger 1998) to include other subgroups groups including: 'Networks of Practice', 'Knowledge Networks', 'Electronic Networks of Practice' and 'Co-Located Communities of Practice' (see Hildreth and Kimble 2004). These models have significantly built upon what Wenger (1998) called constellations of practice. Each adaptation places slightly different emphasis on:

- the main task or function of the group
- the domains within which communication and thus mutual engagement take place (e.g. online spaces, offline spaces and/or both)
- the size of the group
- the frequency of changing relations
- the geographical location of members who participate.

For example, Vaast (2004) explained that "CoPs are groups of interacting agents who share common activities and knowledge. Networks of Practice, however, are composed of people who

are geographically separate but who still share work-related practices" (p.216). Based on his analysis of four case studies, Vaast (2004) concluded that:

> Intranet systems provide the means by which members of local CoPs can overcome geographical distance and connect with other CoPs to create NoPs. Moreover, Vaast found that the acquisition of such systems served to strengthen a local community of practice as well as establishing connections with a wider network of practice (p.216)

However, the proliferation of the CoP model and its application in diverse fields of research has not happened without controversy (see: Cox 2005). The CoP framework is often described by critics as a powerless concept (e.g. Barton and Tusting 2005; Contu and Willmot 2003; Hong 2009). Koliba and Gajda (2009) argue that the CoP model is therefore an under-operationalised and mostly normative construct. Others have criticised the focus on single communities and on the "apprenticeship trajectory from the periphery to the heart of the community of practice" (Hutchinson et al. 2015, p.15). In my application of Bernsteinian theory (see Section 4.4), I address some of these criticisms.

4.4.2   Learning in Landscapes of Practice

In their co-authored book: *Learning in landscapes of practice: boundaries, identity and knowledgeability*, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) set out a framework for what they conceptualise as a Landscape of Practice (LoP). They open their discussion by acknowledging that:

> The notion of a single community of practice misses the complexity of most 'bodies of knowledge'. Professional occupations, and even most non-professional endeavours, are constituted by a complex landscape of different Communities of Practice – involved not only in practicing the occupation, but also in research, teaching and management, regulation, associations, and many other relevant dimensions. All of these practices have their own histories, domains, and regimes of competence. (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner 2015, p.14)

This more recent work, however, moves away from a focus on single communities towards social learning systems. Accordingly, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner deployed the metaphor of a *landscape* to refer to the wider body of knowledge rooted in the continued production, application and evolution of multiple social practices (p.12). A landscape, therefore, might describe a profession, for instance, that consists of a complex and broad collection of CoPs and the boundaries that exist between them. This focus, therefore, offers a bird's-eye view of the numerous social practices that constitute our lives (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Moreover, as we navigate our own trajectories, we acquire different needs and interests. It follows that both our relations and our alignment to different CoPs alters and shift too. The LoP framework therefore places significant importance on boundaries within the context of an individual's multi-membership.

The metaphor of a landscape is particularly useful for home-education, because it moves beyond Safran's (2008) analysis of singular offline communities and would also more loosely organised home-education groups; facilitated across both online and offline spaces.

Knowledgeability describes the multidimensional relations that are created and manifested by the individuals who participate in the landscape. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) also explained that in certain regions in the landscape, one's identity and experiences are more or less *expressible*. For example, if you were a member of a Facebook group dedicated to discussing and sharing vegan recipes, you might refrain from disclosing that you instead see yourself as a vegetarian (and therefore consume animal products). However, in other domains, you might feel able to disclose this information and in so doing express parts of your identity more fully. Refraining from expressing your identity in some arenas and not in others is what Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner called *modulation*. As the landscape develops, managing the components of one's identity becomes a complex achievement.

4.4.3 Regimes of competence

As we journey through the landscape, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner (2015) explained, we construct an image of ourselves based on our *imagination* of others. If you are a teacher in a classroom, for example, you know that there are thousands of other teachers in classrooms, perhaps similar to yours; you can picture these teachers and see yourself as one of them (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner 2015, p.20). Moreover, stories, language and pictures, for example, function as tools that facilitate *imagination*. These images are central to interpreting *relations of identification* in the landscape (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.20). Engagement, on the other hand, refers to "doing things, working on issues, talking, using and producing artifacts" (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.15).

However, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) pointed out that we do not have time or resources to participate in every community in a LoP. Instead, we choose from them based on the degree to which they fee accountable to the *enterprise* of that practice. For instance, a first-year university student might join a debating society and participate in this group frequently throughout the course of their degree. Upon graduation, the debating society is no longer relevant to their identity as a working professional (rather than a university student). Consequently, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner argued, over time the landscape becomes dynamic as communities arise, disappear, evolve, merge, split, compete with or complement each other, and ignore or engage with each other (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, p.15).

However, the experience of having participated in a community in the past might be central to the way we see ourselves in the present. For example, the previous experience of being home – educated might be influential to ways in which learners come to view themselves as young adults, living and learning away from home (see Webb 1990). In this way, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) argued, even groups that we do not currently participate in can "become part of our experiences and contribute to our identities" (p.13).

In 1998, Wenger first developed the term 'modes of belonging' to describe the types of relationships that members had with a Community of Practice. In *Learning in landscapes of practice: boundaries, identity, and knowledgeability in practice-based learning,* Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) adapted this to modes of identification', which they felt better described one's relationship to a Landscape of Practice (comprised of many communities). In doing so, they were keen to point out the contrast between *alignment*, *competence* and *knowledgeability*. Accordingly, all three of these modes can produce different degrees of identification. Moreover, these relationships can be local (i.e. relate to an individual community) or can extend to the entire landscape (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.17).

The concept of *alignment* refers to an active two-way "process whereby enterprises, perspectives, interpretations and contexts" (p.22) are coordinated actions that we might expect. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner provided an example of how following directions or negotiating a plan is form of *alignment*. Additionally, "fighting a law we find unjust, abiding by a moral code, joining a strike, or recycling are all processes of alignment that can become very deep aspects of our identities" (p.19).

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) argued that learning is not simply the acquisition of knowledge; in its embodied form, it makes us who we are. In this way, as we construct knowledge, knowledge constructs us. Moreover, as communities grow and evolve in the landscape, some may claim to represent areas of expertise. For example, in the landscape of cinematography, some *regions* might claim to have expertise in the techniques of electromagnetic lighting. Consequently, identifying with that region in the landscape necessitates competencies in the regime of electromagnetic lighting. Alternatively, if you possess expertise in animation, *electromagnetic lighting* is not a regime of competence in cinematography that you would identify with. In this way, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) explained:

> On our learning journey, engagement gives us direct experience of regimes of competence, whether our engagement is a visit or a lifetime commitment, whether the result is an experience of competence or incompetence, and whether we develop an identity of participation or non-participation (p.15).

4.4.4 Relations

In their earlier work on situated learning and *peripheral participation*, Lave and Wenger (1991) set out two important relations of identity between members of a CoP. On the one hand, *legitimate* members of a Community of Practice are recognised as 'fully fledged' members of the community and are thus accountable to the shared enterprise of that group. Some of these individuals might act as *brokers*, working between different communities to improve the practice of another community (Wenger 1998). Moreover, brokers can also manage the *boundaries* between practice. Illegitimate peripheral participants, on the other hand, are situated on the margins of a CoP. In their identity of *non-participation*, learning the ways and the thinking associated with that practice, individuals move from the peripheries to the centre of the group. In this process, the pedagogic relationship between the experienced fully-fledged member and the peripheral member is of significance

When providing a service in the LoP, competent practitioners might act as a representative of groups and communities, some of which they might directly engage in (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.18). In this way, the work of some practitioners might tangibly affect the resources for learning available in the landscape. The notion of competence is therefore particularly useful for exploring the differential relations that might exist between 'experienced' home-educators (see Safran 2008) with those who have recently decided to home-educate.

Knowledgeability is a complex achievement. It combines many relationships of identification and dis-identification through multiple modes. These relationships to the landscape are resources and fragments of experience to be assembled dynamically in moments of engagement in practice. Practitioners need to negotiate their role, optimize their contribution, know where relevant sources of knowledge are, and be practiced at bringing various sources of knowledge to bear on unforeseen and ambiguous situations (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). This concept is useful for exploring points when parents new to home-education, for example, negotiate and make sense of their changed role as parents. Moreover, it also might help to explain how and why participation in 'neighbourhood' groups (Safran 2008) for example, might change across different points in home-education.

In the application of Wenger's (1998) earlier CoP model, several researchers have pointed to the absence of an analysis of power (see: Barton and Tusting 2005; Hong 2009). The notion of what happens to the enterprise of a community when the role of boundary manager serves to go against the mutually negotiated enterprise of a community was not explored. However, here Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) did emphasise the contested nature of a terrain, within which

"various communities claim the right to define competence in their domain" (p.14). However, even when considered with their commentary on the 'landscape as political' (p.14), arguably the updated constructs provided by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) do not do enough to theorise how power and control might function between *regimes of competence* in the landscape.

Although promising, the 17-page LoP framework modelled by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) is perhaps only a formative proposition of a conceptualised model to come. Nevertheless, I agree with others such as Wolfenden (2015) that the overall move from single communities towards wider social learning systems is a positive development for Wenger's (1998) seminal work. The focus on boundaries as a frame for exploration is useful in understanding how home-educators might reflexively come to see some communities as more important to their practice than others. Moreover, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) analysis might usefully surface possible tensions and disturbances between home-educators as they navigate between the competing *regimes of competence* to which they are accountable.

4.5 Bernsteinian ideas

Bernstein was first and foremost a sociologist of education. His life's work, spanning four decades, was dedicated to grappling with complex issues of knowledge, schooling and inequality (Singh 2002, p.1). Some have argued that Bernstein was one of the "most influential and widely discussed theorists in the sociology of knowledge" (Singh 2002, p.1). As a researcher and theorist of knowledge, cultural reproduction and pedagogy, Bernstein drew in his work on Weberian, Marxist, interactionist and Durkheimian theoretical orientations (Sadovnik 2001, p.608).

Pertinently, the production and transformation of knowledge within, and across, multiple domains of practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) are important themes in this thesis. To explain the ways in which knowledge was created, changed and reproduced in the relations between home-educators and home-educated learners, I drew on several Bernsteinian ideas. Bernstein's earlier works *Class, codes and control volume 3: towards a theory of educational transmissions* (1975a) and *Class and pedagogies: visible and invisible* (1975b) were particularly influential. Additionally, *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: theory, research, critique* (2000) was one of Bernstein's more recent texts that I frequently consulted. In the discussion that follows, I outline Bernstein's code theory, paying close attention to the message systems and pedagogic relations theorised in the transmission of class values. Consequently, some of these ideas have extended the Community of Practice (Wenger 1998) and the Landscape of Practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) models in key areas. Thus, it will be argued that a reading of

social learning systems theory, together with Bernstein, is of value to other researchers of education. More specifically, for researchers of home-education, it offers a

However, Bernstein's work has not escaped controversy. Critiques point to the almost impenetrable quality of his writing. In addition, researchers of education often shy away from using Bernstein's code theory because of its complexity and high level of abstraction. As Atkinson (2001) remarked, "his ideas do not translate easily into simple formulae. They demand serious attention" (p.37, cited in Cause 2010, p.3). Moreover, Bernstein's theoretical models have also been criticised for a lack of applicability to everyday life, while others have interpreted his texts as promoting a dichotomous and somewhat fatalistic interpretation of class divisions. As Sadovnik (2001) observed, "[a]lthough committed to equity and social justice […], his work was often misunderstood and incorrectly labelled as a form of 'cultural deficit' theory" (p.608).

I certainly agree with the claim that Bernstein's work is by no means easy to digest. Moreover, I do not profess expertise in all of Bernstein's work. What follows, however, is an account of the influential ideas and key concepts that I used and the reasons why this was a productive endeavour.

4.5.1 Code theory

According to Bernstein, there are message systems within which class values and ideologies are produced, changed and reproduced. Bernstein (1975a) called these the field of *generation*, *reproduction* and *recontextualisation*. Bernstein's notion of *field* was clearly influenced by Bourdieu's notion of *field*. Bourdieu conceptualised *field* as a "network of social relations, structured systems of social positions, within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over resources, stakes and access" (Bourdieu 1990, cited in Pressley 2015). Bourdieu's most recent definition placed greater emphasis on the power relations in *field* structures:

The structure of the field is a state of the power relations among agents' institutions engaged in the struggle, or, to put it another way, a state of the distribution of the specific capital which has been accumulated in the source of previous struggles and which orients subsequent strategies (Bourdieu 1993, p.73). Thus, in its most basic form, *field* refers to the sites or arenas within which individuals utilise resources to acquire symbolic control and status. The influence of Bourdieu's work on capital in this study is discussed in greater detail in Section 4.5. However, Bernstein's theorisation of *field* explains the production of power and control as it is relayed from a state (i.e. a national curriculum), or institutional (school) level to a teacher/student level (pedagogic relations). Cause (2010) succinctly explained the process of *generation*, *recontextualisation* and *reproduction*:

> [W]hen a curriculum moves from one place to another, it gets *recontextualised* because it is inevitable that a transformation will take place from the state curriculum authorities, to

the school, then to the teacher and then to the student. Ideology shapes this process and then ideology becomes shaped by the student when the student realizes and appropriates the discourse. (Cause 2010, p.6)

Thus, through these three message systems, the ideologies of the dominant cultural group are created, *classified*, *controlled* and *transmitted* to learners through the organisation of a school (Cause 2010). Through this process, *knowledge* is transformed into pedagogic communication. The messages themselves form part of Bernstein's (2000) more recent work on the *pedagogic device*. Arguably, Bernstein's focus on message systems in the production of *curriculum* and *language* offers researchers the direct ability to "question the ways in which values could or *are* being reproduced, maintained or produced by the dominant class and dominant culture of the school" (Cause 2010, p.5). Regarding the content of the messages relayed through the vessels of *generation*, *recontextualisation* and *reproduction*, Bernstein differentiated between *elaborated* and *restricted* code. Broadly, the elaborated code, or expressive code, is one that mirrors the culture, values and ideology of the middle classes. In the school curriculum, for example, it is a kind of language that can only be fully understood by middle-class pupils who have been immersed in the wider culture from which it is derived. With access, only to the *restricted code,* working-class pupils are disadvantaged because of these structures. In this way, Bernstein's (1975a) code theory shows how schools maintain the social reproduction of class inequalities that are mirrored in society.

However, Bernstein's notion code theory is not just applicable to the analyses of language and curricula in the context of a school. Regarding the every-day practices of home-educating families, it can be used explore the ways in which home-educators arrange the learning environment within and outside of the home. For example, this might include a parent placing specially selected library books in the living room for their children to find and read. It could also encompass home-educators tacitly encouraging their children to socialise with a like-minded group of home-educating families. This would generate a greater awareness of the possibilities and constraints on subsequent learning and on the reinforcing processes used in home-education.

4.5.2 Classification and framing

Bernstein's (1975a) concepts of *classification* and *frame* were also important constructs that I worked with in this thesis. Broadly, *classification* was a term first employed by Bernstein to explain the degree of managed separation between subject areas (or content) taught in a school curriculum (Cause 2010). The concept of *frame*, on the other hand, was used to refer to the degree of control afforded to the learner in deciding *what* to learn, *where* (the environment) and *when* this learning takes place (Cause 2010).

Classification can be said to be strong when a teacher, for example, teaches History as a clearly separated and explicitly timetabled lesson. However, instruction and organisation that encourages learners to draw connections across multiple subjects in the same lesson, e.g. History, Art and Geography, could be described as weakly *classified*. To add further complexity, *classification* levels can be altered during a single lesson. As Cause (2010) explained, "[y]ou could have *strong classification* over the subject taught in the class, but *weak classification* over the teacher that delivers the content, where teachers may rotate classrooms to teach within that subject" (p.7). In this way, Cause (2010) argued, the educational researcher seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which a curriculum is socially constructed.

In their model of a LoP Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) expressed the importance of boundaries. In response to Brown and Duguid's (1991; 2000) model of a Network of Practice, they remarked that:

> we are less concerned with the different types of social formations that can sustain a given practice, than we are with the multiplicity of those practices involved, the importance of boundaries among them, and with problematizing identification and knowledgeability across these boundaries. (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.20)

For an analysis of *boundaries*, Bernstein's (1975b) concepts of *classification* and *frame* were useful in the application of the LoP model. Notably, in this thesis, *classification* was used to specify the degree of *boundary* maintained between some of the different online and offline groups described by the participants sampled in this research (see *Chapter 6*). Arguably, *classification* is a helpful tool for understanding the degree of boundary maintenance undertaken by agents working in the Landscape. Moreover, within the LoP model, the concept of *frame* can also be used to describe the *strength of boundary* among competing *regimes of competence* (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). This supports Cause's (2010) view that "[a]nalysing the strength of framing in an educational organisation can help illuminate the power particular agencies have over what, when and how knowledge is learnt" (p.7).

In this thesis, the concept of *frame* was also employed to describe *pedagogic relations* between new and more experienced home-educators in their journey towards an alternative destination in education (see *Chapter six*). Arguably, my analysis demonstrated that the concept of *frame* can extend an application of the CoP model to conceptualise power in the pedagogic relations between *peripheral participants* and *legitimate members* (Wenger 1998).

4.5.3 *Visible and Invisible pedagogies*

In his paper *Class and pedagogies: visible and invisible*, Bernstein (1975b) made the case for the existence of two distinct kinds of pedagogy in education. Drawing on the cultural context and

117

assumptions in preschool/infant school pedagogy, Bernstein (1975b) outlined six key features of a form of pedagogy called the invisible type. This included

1. *where the control of the teacher over the child is implicit rather than explicit*

2. *where, ideally, the teacher arranges the* <u>context</u> *which the child is expected to rearrange and explore*

3. *where within this arranged content the child apparently has wider powers over what he selects, over how he structures, and over the timescale of his activities*

4. *where the child apparently regulates his own movements and social relationships*

5. *where there is a reduced emphasis upon the transmission and acquisition of specific skills [Note I removed]*

6. *where the criteria for evaluating the pedagogy are multiple and diffuse and so not easily measured.* (p.9)

Contrary to the explicit rules and regulations that one could easily identify in more visible forms of pedagogy, the relations of power and control between teacher (transmitter) and learner (acquirer) are tacit in invisible types. For instance, in a hypothetical secondary school, a teacher can determine the progress of pupils via a formal written examination. The use of levels and grading criteria provide clearly defined markers of pupil progress. Moreover, the National Curriculum in secondary schools is explicitly defined and delivered in a carefully timetabled and tightly regulated format. Pupils, therefore, have little control over what and when they learn. These are just some of the ways in which visible types of pedagogy have strong *classification* and *frames* (Bernstein 1975b). However, the *sequence* and *pace* via which pupils engage in educational activities are more fluid and loosely defined in invisible types. Invisible forms of pedagogy are therefore characterised by weak *classification* and *frames* (Bernstein 1975b). This framework is particularly suited to the analyses of the evaluative criteria used by home-educators, whose children do not follow a formal curriculum and/or receive timetabled lessons (see Thomas 1998).

The interrelated terms *sequence* (in what order) and *pace* (when) were useful for critically unpicking some of the assumptions that autonomous styles of home-education (*as an example*) are entirely devoid of control (see *Chapter two*). An application of these terms allowed me to explore a complex and multidimensional array of styles, methods and techniques previously practised in home-education.

Another feature that separates invisible from visible types, is the relationship between the educator and the learner. With the former, social hierarchies are not explicitly defined, with teacher positioned as facilitators rather than instructors. As Bernstein (1975b) explained:

The status of teachers from this point of view is based upon diffuse, tacit, symbolic control which is legitimised by a closed explicit ideology, the essence of weak classification and weak frames (p.12).

However, Bernstein (1975b) argued that invisible pedagogies were not devoid of power and control. In contrast to visible types, surveillance takes place through implicit, rather than explicit process. Regarding invisible pedagogies, Bernstein explained that play was an area of high visibility for teachers. Play, as a form of business and 'doing', is interpreted by teachers as a marker of the child's inner readiness. Watching, or screening, a child play is therefore and important component in the evaluation techniques available to the teacher. In this way Bernstein (1975b) explains that "[p]lay is the means by which the child exteriorises himself to the teacher. Thus, the more a child plays, and the greater the range of his activities, the more the child is made available to the teacher's screening" (p.10). Play, therefore is not just an activity, it is also an evaluation of that activity. It follows that "implicit nurture reveals unique nature" (Bernstein 1975b, p.13)

Thus, for Bernstein (1975b) "a non-doing child in the invisible pedagogy is the equivalent of a non-reading child in the visible" (p.10). This in turn, gives rise to a form of tacit, but totalising symbolic control because the child can never know their future development. For these reasons, Bernstein (1975b) positioned invisible pedagogy as an interrupter system that "transforms the privatised social structures and cultural contexts of visible pedagogies into personalised social structure and personalised cultural contexts" (p.13).

 Furthermore, regarding *frame*, the related terms *sequence* (in what order) and *pace* (when) were useful for exploring the some of the implicit mechanisms of surveillance described in different home-education pedagogies (Bernstein 1971). An application of these terms allowed me to explore a complex and multi-dimensional array of styles, methods and techniques previously practiced in home-education. Furthermore, *classification* and *frame* also shaped my interpretation of the instructional styles and curricular adopted in different styles of home-educating (see Section 4.4.4). Regarding the use of these concepts in educational research, Cause (2010) argued that:

"at micro level, helps to bring into analysis that ways in which the teacher influences student learning through the control each teacher possesses of what *is* and what is *not* transmitted through pedagogy, assessment, and curriculum. At a macro level, it helps to illuminate influence outside agencies have on *what*, *how* and *when* content is transmitted" (p.8).

However, Bernstein's ideas were developed in and have been almost entirely applied to research on the curriculum and pedagogy in schools (for an example see: Walford 1995). However, I would argue that his ideas are far more relevant and applicable to the institutional schooled context from within which they were derived.

4.6   Social and cultural capital

A central body of knowledge used in this thesis originates in Bourdieu's (1986; 1973;1979) work on forms of capital and social reproduction. More specifically, I frequently drew upon his formulation of *social* and *cultural capital*.

As Bourdieu was a poststructuralist, his theory of capital was a mechanism through which to explain how and why class inequalities are created and reproduced in the social organisations and institutions. Bourdieu (1986) coined three mains forms of capital: *symbolic capital*, *cultural capital* and *social capital.* Symbolic capital refers to the resources available to an individual based on honour, prestige or recognition (Bourdieu 1979). It is therefore the value that an individual possesses within a culture. Moreover, symbolic capital can be inherited but also acquired.

With Passeron, Bourdieu (1990) developed the idea of cultural capital. Just as individuals have more capital than others, they also acquire cultural capital through their upbringing and education, a process that makes them familiar with the dominant culture in society. Individuals with high levels of cultural capital can use this to gain social advantages. Furthermore, individuals can possess cultural capital in three main forms that Bourdieu (1986) distinguished as *embodied*, *objectified* and *institutionalised* states. Embodied capital refers to intangible and internal resources such as knowledge. Objectified capital, on the other hand, is visible in tangible material objects such as clothing, houses or cars. Lastly, Bourdieu's notion of institutionalised cultural capital encompasses formal things that society recognises and values, such as qualifications and titles. Within this, Bourdieu (1973) argued that all institutions have arbitrary cultural rules and ideas that are distinct from explicit or 'official' knowledge. This includes characteristics such as manners, etiquette and use of language.

Perhaps most central to the analysis of capital presented in this thesis is Bourdieu's idea of social capital. Crucially, he suggested that, through networking with one another, individuals and groups can acquire and extend social forms of capital. Social capital allows individuals and social groups to secure or advance their social position, for example in social networks. Social capital can also be used to acquire financial capital. For example, consider the scenario of two recent graduates who are both seeking work: Graduate A and Graduate B both hold the same degree, from the same institution, but Graduate A's father is the manager of a prestigious law firm. Following a graduate job opening in that same law firm, Graduate A's father uses his social contacts (high social capital) to 'put in a good word' for his son. Graduate A has a clear advantage over Graduate B, and, following interview, is offered the position. Graduate A uses his first pay cheque to buy a car

(monetary capital transferred into objectified cultural capital). Thus, in addition to accents, grammar, spelling and style, social networks are of vital importance to the success of groups in society.

In their work: *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) argued, modern education systems presuppose the possession of cultural capital. Success, therefore, is facilitated by the possession of cultural capital and of higher class habitus. Pupils from lower-class backgrounds do not possess these resources, leading to class inequalities in educational attainment. Meanwhile, the weak attainment levels of working-class pupils are framed as a failure of individual efforts instead of consequences of a system that favours pedagogic transmission of higher-class values and norms. Writing on education systems in France (originally in the late 1970s), Passeron and Bourdieu (1990) argued that schools were a poor mechanism for promoting social mobility and equality in society.

In relation to his theory of capital, some have pointed out Bourdieu's assumption that social and cultural capital is largely transferred via parents. Evidently, in the age of new technologies and online communities, this may occur in a range of different and important spaces in addition to the role of parents. A further source of critique is that gender is not a prominent feature in much of Bourdieu's analysis; gender inequalities are rife within institutions, yet in his analysis men and women apparently occupy the same habitus.

4.6.1 Bridging and bonding

In this thesis, I also drew on Putnam's (2000) formulation of bridging and bonding capital.

In its most basic form, bonding capital is the *internal* dimensions of capital that groups possess, typically in form of intra-community ties and common ground that facilitates a sense of closeness, belonging and shared identity. In this way, bonding capital is useful for society in that it can serve to generate reciprocity and solidarity (Putnam 2000). The latter, might be evidenced through degree of brokerage (Burt 2005)- and thus the frequency and ease of boundary crossing between different regions in a LoP (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015)

 Bridging capital on the other hand, refers to the degree of social linkages created processes of information exchange across multiple groups (*external*). When viewed the LoP framework, the informational diffusion (Putnam 2000) and external assets shared in between different regions in the landscape might tell us something about the degree to which the localised practices of different groups are innovative (Wenger 1998). Evidently, Putnam's formulation of social capital is useful tool for exploring the kinds of relations, resources and social societal structures that might be mirrored in the kinds of online and offline groups that exist in home-education. Notably, the extent to which communities and networks foster bridging and bonding capital is an important distinction

to draw because in his own words Putnam (2002) states that "the externalities of groups are likely to be positive, while networks that bonding (limited within certain social niches) are at greater risk of producing externalities that are negative" (Putnam 2002 cited in Norris 2004, p.32).

Bridging and bonding capital has been used widely by social researchers to explain the social connections and resources shared within and between a host of online groups facilitated online. Based on her survey research, Norris (2004) uses Putnam's (2000) formulation of social capital to take us beyond the simplistic binary of the role of internet communities as either good or bad for society. Crucially, she argued that the bridging and bonding roles facilitated by online groups can play socially constructive and dysfunctional roles.

Notably, in *The Bridging and Bonding Role of Online Communities*, Norris (2004) developed a schema for the social function of online communities. Using the bridging and bonding typology, Norris proposed that:

> [P]ure bonding groups are most likely to occur online where social homogeneity and ideological homogeneity overlap, deepening networks among people sharing similar backgrounds and beliefs. In contrast, where the internet draws together people from diverse social backgrounds and beliefs and thereby widens contacts, the typology suggests that this generates pure bridging groups (p.34).

Crucially, Norris (2004) argued that bridging and bonding forms of social capital should be viewed as continuum rather than a dichotomy. This is because, both networks typically possess both forms to varying degrees. Norris (2004) argues that some networks might fall more closely towards bonding groups, while others might also possess more bridging capital than bonding capital (although the latter is still present in said group).

More recently, in their research *Connection strategies: Social capital implication of Facebook-enabled communication practices*, Ellison and Lampe (2011) make use of *bridging* and *bonding* social capital to explain the connection and information seeking strategies of undergraduates who used Facebook. They concluded that identity information in Facebook (i.e. profile pictures, timeline sections etc.) act as form of social lubricant "encouraging individuals to convert latent to weak ties and enabling them to broadcast requests for support or information" (p.873). For home-education, the concept of bridging and bonding capital is useful for exploring the ways in which some families might see themselves as closely affiliated groups and the degree to which these groups communicate with one another.

4.7   Other concepts used

A few ancillary constructs also supported the development of my conceptual toolkit. These included i) *risk* and *unintended consequences* (Giddens 1990), ii) class and school choice: *'push' and 'pull' factors* (Ball 2002; Ball 2006; Ball and Vincent 2006) and ii) *cultural enrichment* and *concerted cultivation* (Lareau 2003; Vincent and Maxwell 2016). The following section briefly outlines the origins of these ideas.

Unintended consequences are a ubiquitously used term in wider social research. Originally coined by Merton (1936) and then developed by Giddens (1990), it was used in my analysis to convey the sense in which, through their collective social action, groups can alter the structures and relations among themselves in unforeseen ways. Central to this idea is *ontological insecurity* and risk. Notably, to account for the dynamic agency of social actors, De Zwart (2015) extended this perspective to highlight that *unintended consequences* can be either *anticipated* or *unanticipated*.

In his work: *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The Middle Classes and Social Advantage*, Ball (2002) differentiated between what he conceptualised as *push* and *pull* factors in the school choice of middle class parents. Push and pull factors form a continuum that Ball used to capture the extent to which parents have agency in deciding which school their child/children should attend. On one side of the spectrum, push factors presuppose negative reasons that are somewhat forced upon parents and families. While pull, factors imply positive reasons that serve to actively guide school choice. In this way, school choice can contain a multitude of reasons that simultaneously *push* and *pull* parents towards a outcome. In this study, I found the Ball's (2003) notion of *push* and *pull* factors helpful for making sense of the multiple and diffuse reasons for home-education (see *Chapter seven*).

In explaining the social demographics, reasons and practices of the home-educating parents sampled in this study, I also drew on the works of Lareau (2003); Vincent and Ball (2006) and Vincent and Maxwell (2016). The concept of *concerted cultivation* was originally developed by Lareau (2003) in her work: *Unequal childhoods*. Broadly, *concerted cultivation* refers to type of parenting practice whereby parents actively search for and provide organised activities with the explicit intention of nurturing their child's individual talents. Examples might include, providing out of school hours' Spanish lessons with the view to eventually cultivating a multi-lingual child. In the short term, this extra tuition is therefore likely to improve a child's performance in language subjects at school. In the longer term, learners who are proficient in multiple foreign languages are more likely to acquire additional opportunities regarding the geographic location and forms of employment available to them. In this way, cultural enrichment explains the seemingly 'invisible', but never-the-less active choices, and the social and education activities undertaken by middle

class parents to ensure that their children possess a social advantage over others (Vincent and Maxwell 2016).

4.8   Summary

This chapter has described the social constructivist theoretical moorings of this thesis. Specifically, it has explained how and why various concepts were selected and woven together to interpret the mixed methods data obtained in the research. Although there were several theoretical avenues that alternatively could have been explored, the constructs used to conceptualise *community*, *networks* and *knowledge* were jointly derived from a practice-based learning perspective (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) alongside Bernsteinian ideas (1975a; 1975b; 2000). In the process, it was argued that a more sophisticated reading of power and control within social learning systems was possible. Together with theories of capital (Bourdieu 1976; Putnam 2000) and the other ideas outlined in Section 4.6, this framework is of future value to scholars researching forms of community and networks in education. In terms of researching home-education, however, I reflected on the implicit limitations of adopting several constructs that have previously been used to research the dominant form of education provision: school. However, it was also argued that the creation of new knowledge necessarily requires drawing on old constructs (Pattison 2015). Using this toolkit, *Chapters five* to *eight* present the findings of this thesis

Chapter 5 : The landscape of communities and networks in home-education

5.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the ways in which home-educators with mutual interests and disparate needs have networked themselves through the appropriation of new technologies. More specifically, I focus on the Yahoo! and Facebook groups created to support various aspects of home-education and describe how these networks have evolved to cater for different communities. Regarding the survey data, the first half the chapter provides an account of the familial situations, parental ideologies and educational approaches of this population. From this vantage point, I demonstrate that home-educators have different knowledges and histories, pointing towards the existence of distinct localised practises (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner 2015). Thus, it is argued that home-education practice is highly varied and unique from family-to-family. However, while home-educators perceive and enact their view of education differently, they share similar occupational positions and social values.

Drawing on the interview data and previous literature, I argue that this population constitutes a social group rich in cultural capital (Jenkins 1992). Drawing on Bernstein (1975), the CoP model and (Wenger 1998) and the LoP (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) framework, I show that home-educators are therefore dissimilar in terms of their local practises, but they are closely *aligned* to a broader shared enterprise of education. It is the coexistence of highly differentiated local practises and a *shared enterprise* (Wenger 1998) that has shaped why home-educators have organised themselves using the technologies of Yahoo! and Facebook. Consequently, in the second half of this chapter, I explain how key areas of *differentiation* (Bernstein 1975a) and mutual interest, have given rise to new structures within what is now likely to be a complex landscape of interconnected networks and communities dedicated to support the diverse practices of home-education. To do this, I show how the boundaries, roles and relations between home-educators have been translated online and changed offline. When viewed together with previous literature, it is argued that home-education constitutes a landscape of social practice - undertaken by a diverse collection of communities and networks (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner 2015). I close the chapter by briefly alluding to the implications of these findings for the CoPs researched in home-education (see Safran 2008).

5.2   Sources of differentiation in home-education practice

Previous research has shown that there are several ways one could attempt to classify home-educators. In *Chapter two*, I discussed how Van Galen's (1991) classification of 'ideologues' and 'pedagogues' has become a benchmark for the development of other typologies. Based on their research findings, Rothermel (2003), and more recently, Lees (2011) and Nelson (2013), have demonstrated that attempting to group home-educators on the basis of their reasons for home-education, ideological and/or religious beliefs, education approaches and/or practices is inherently problematic. Others, have clearly shown that often families have multiple, and sometimes interlinked reasons for home-education. Moreover, Fortune-Wood's (2005) research highlighted that the approaches and methods used in home-education are likely to evolve across the number of years spent home-educating. The transformative nature of these characteristics indicates that attempting to analytically group parents or families in a narrow way would not yield meaningful results.

Drawing on the survey responses and interview data obtained in this study, it is evident that home-education families have diverse needs and interests. In *Chapters seven* and *eight*, I explore in greater depth, the multiple dispositions, identities and pedagogies adopted by the families sampled in this research. Here however, my intentions are not to classify home-educators and/or their families in ways that others have previously done. In answering part of my first research question, instead I use several of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayners' (2015) ideas to generate a more sophisticated and multi-dimensional account of the kinds of groups and communities thought to exist in home-education.

The first half of this chapter describes the characteristics which serve to differentiate and align collections of families from each other. In other words, I show that the population of parents sampled in this research possess unique histories, perspectives and repertoires that inform how and why their family chose to home-educate. From this vantage point, the epistemic uniqueness of groups and communities collectively engaged in the practice of home-education is made apparent. It follows that the population sampled in this study, constituted a collection of individuals who identify with what Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) would describe as *local regimes of competence.*

5.2.1   Family situations

This research found that home-educating families are not confined towards one locality, but reside in a range of different geographies. For instance, the 242 home-educators surveyed resided in different parts of England, Scotland and Wales, and across both sparsely and more densely

populated areas (see fig. 5.2.1 below). The largest portion of families lived in the South East (19%), followed by the South West (17%), and East Anglia (16%). While a smaller proportion resided in Scotland (1%), the North East (2%) and Wales (6%) (N=238). Further, of the 240 home-educators to respond to the question, 100 (43%) identified their family's area of residence as 'Suburban', followed by 80 (33%) as 'Rural', and the remaining 60 (25%) resided in 'Urban' areas. These findings support the previous observations made by Rothermel (2003) and Fortune-Wood (2005)-who highlighted the disparate nature of the home-educating population in England.

Consequently, the survey data pointed towards a group of families who, in all likelihood, led comparatively different lives; in terms of their access to public services including transport, healthcare, and school provision (Pateman 2011). For instance, a number resided in different parts of England, Scotland and Wales, and across both sparsely and more densely populated areas (see Figure 5.2.1, below):

Figure 5.2.1: Locality of survey respondents
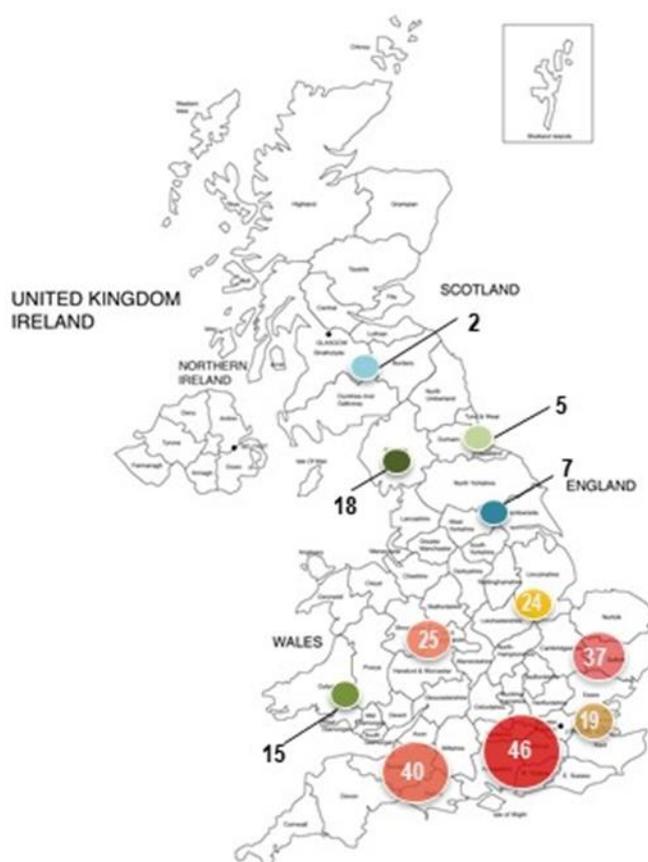
Collectively, the 242 respondents who responded to the survey question were parents of 607 children and young people of a variety of ages. See Table 5.1.1.a below:

Table 5.2.1 a: A table to illustrate family size

Number of children in family	Number of families
0	1
1	46
2	95
3	55
4	34
5	9
6	3
7	1
Total children=607	Total families= 242

Additionally, the 242 home-educators surveyed collectively had 607 children. The average number of children per household was 2.5 - higher than the national 1.6 average of the general population. Again, this supports tentative suggestions that the average size of home-education families might be larger than the national population for both married and unmarried couples (1.7-1.8, ONS 2012) as noted by both Rothermel (2002) and Fortune-Wood (2005). However, this figure is greater than the 1.8 average family size reported in Fortune-wood's (2005) research.

Of the 237 survey respondents to complete the question, the ages of the 409 children of a compulsory school age (5 years old-17 years old) and forms of previous and current educational provision, also suggest diversity in terms of the interests and needs of learners of home-education families[26]. See Table 5.2.1b below:

Table 5.2.1b: Ages of children in home-educated families (N=237)

Ages (grouped)	Count
1-4yrs	101
5-7yrs	119
8-11yrs	140
12-14yrs	90
15-17yrs	60
18yrs +	58

---

[26] This is the combined number of children who receive a variety of different educational provisions including: 'home-education', 'state school provision', 'independent schooling' and/or 'mixed provision'.

Total	568

The gender of the 409 children and young people was almost evenly split, with 49% males and 51% females. Interestingly, in examining the previous and current educational provision of the children and young people of compulsory school age, the clear majority had attended state schooling provision at either primary and or secondary level. In half of these families (131), at least one child was currently attending school at primary or secondary level.

What this suggests is that, as a population, these parents are likely not just to support children who are home-educated - but also those who currently attend school. This in turn would suggest that the academic needs of children within these families are likely to be highly differentiated.

5.2.2   Parental dispositions: ideologies, beliefs and experiences

The findings of this study indicated that parents who home-educate are likely to have disparate ways of thinking and knowing about the value of education, school and family life. These distinctions were most apparent in the reasons why families had opted to home-educate and in the styles and methods they used to undertake this educational alternative. Notably, nearly half (123) of the 242 survey respondents indicated that their home-education practice was influenced by educational philosophies, methods and or/approaches, while the remaining 47% (114) suggested that it was not. It could be inferred that some home-educators do not explicitly identify with, or feel an affiliation to, prescribed educational approaches and or philosophies. The notion that clearly-defined educational styles or curricular are rigidly followed by home-education families is mistaken. This is not to suggest that some families do not adopt more formal educational approaches and prescribed curricular throughout the course of their home-education journey. Rather, parental commitment to philosophies and the adoption of explicit education styles and techniques is a process that is subject to continuous alteration. I develop this argument further in *Chapters seven* and *nine*, but here it is important to highlight that some home-educators do consciously align their families practise with key philosophies and educational curricular, while others do not.

 The 112 survey respondents (n=123) who listed key philosophies and approaches influential to their family's practise of home-education, cited an array of thinkers and ideologies. For instance, two respondents cited 'the Bible' and 'the word of God' as important, while another indicated that 'peaceful parenting' was prominent. Table 5.2.2 evidences the likelihood of diversity in terms of the ways of knowing and doing home-education amidst this population of parents. See below:

Table 5.2.2: A table to illustrate the philosophies, approaches and methods influential to home-education practice:

Key thinkers
- **John Holt**
- **AS Neil**
- **Charlotte Mason**
- **John Taylor Gatto**
- **Rudolph Steiner**
- **Lori Pickert**
- **Sir Ken Robinson**
- **Roland Meighan**
- **Peter Gray**
- **Steve Biddolph**
- **Maria Montessori**
- **David Parry**

Approaches
- **Free range education**
- **Waldorf approach**
- **Classical education**
- **Unschooling**

Methods
- **The Sonlight Curriculum**
- **My Bekah academy - virtual classroom**
- **National curriculum: GCSES, iGCSES A-levels**
- **Coursera - virtual courses online**
- **Forest schooling**
- **Montessori nurseries**
- **Flexi-schooling/part-time home-education and school**

Parenting styles
- **Unconditional parenting**
- **Peaceful parenting**
- **Attachment parenting**
- **Positive parenting**

Wellbeing practices
- Mindfulness meditation

Religious affiliation
- **Spirituality & Religious teachings**
- **The bible**
- **God**

Other
- Trivium logic
- Ludology & gaming theory

5.2.3 Educational styles, approaches and curricula

A word cloud, compiled from the terms described in the qualitative accounts of 112 respondents shows the frequency of the influential philosophies, methods and approaches most commonly cited in relation to one and another. See Figure 5.2.3 below:

Figure 5.2.3: A word cloud to visualise educational styles and approaches cited:

Figure 5.2.3 illustrates that 'child led-learning', 'autonomous' and 'unschooling' were the most prominent approaches used among the 112 survey respondents who aligned their practise with an explicit educational style/philosophy. Rudolf Steiner, Maria Montessori and Charlotte Mason were also frequently cited key thinkers. Yet the terms 'structured' and, more broadly 'parenting', were also prominent concepts. This visual representation of the data shows just how numerous the dispositions, values and attitudes of the survey respondents were. These findings represent the artefacts of what is evidently a divergent constellation of interlinked bodies of knowledge to the practices of home-educating families. Tentatively, this shows that the broad field of 'home-education practice' constitutes multiple clusters of disparate and interconnected ways of thinking and knowing about education, schooling, learning and parenting (Wenger 1998).

5.2.4   The needs and interests of learners

In this chapter I have described several explicit and tacit dimensions which differentiated the family characteristics and parental ideologies of the population surveyed in this study. Another layer of complexity within what is evidently a heterogeneous population, was visible in the highly-individualised needs of children in home-educating families. As already discussed, the 607 children within the 242 families profiled were of different ages. While the survey questions did not ascertain the precise number of children who were officially statemented, the special educational needs, mental health conditions and other general health problems of home-educated learners was a prominent theme within the 140 qualitative responses to cite the reasons for home-educating. Just over third of the 140 responses mentioned conditions, most commonly including: 'autism/ Asperger's syndrome', 'sensory processing problems', 'attention deficit hyperactivity disorder',

'dyspraxia' and 'dyslexia'. While just under a quarter of 140 respondents cited mental health, problems including: 'anxiety' and depression', 'emotional difficulties', 'stress' and 'unhappiness'. Such conditions indicate the need for more specialised forms of familial support. Becky, an experienced home-educator explained that the number home-educating families in these circumstances had increased in recent years:

> What has happened over the last 10 years, is that with special schools closing, it has become more difficult to find mainstream schools to meet the needs of special needs kids…we are now seeing more life-limited children...I also hate to say this, but as medicine gets better, the situation also gets worse... **(Becky, OM).**

Moreover, Sharon, an online moderator's remarks demonstrates just how varied the implied emotional, social and academic needs of home-educated children were:

> A surprising amount of children are home-educated because of the mental stress of doing SATs, what with the preparation for them…. A high proportion come out of school being unable to read or write confidently, are dyslexic, or have been totally switched off all learning from being in school. A trend over the past 18 months has been the amount of teenage students who are stressing over exams and who come out of school at 14… **(Sharon, OM).**

For an in-depth discussion on the needs and interests of the children and young people in home-educating families please see *Chapter eight*.

5.2.5 Towards local regimes of competence?

To expand on the formative ideas posited in Section 5.2.1, it could be argued that as a social body of knowledge, home-education practice is made up of what Wenger (1998) and later Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) call *local regimes of competence*. As I explained in *Chapter four*, *regimes of competence* are cultivated by communities with shared interests and repertoires over time. In other words, as social groups of practice grow, change and evolve over time, some come to claim specialist areas of expertise. It follows that members who identify with regimes of competence are mutually accountable to their group's shared ways of knowing and methods of pursuing home-education.

The possible existence of local regimes of competence is evidenced in the interview accounts of both online moderators and home-educators. Firstly, Elaine explained that because of family diversity, there is no singular 'community' that represents the population of home-educators in Britain. In her words:

> There is a huge spectrum of home-education practice. People who follow loosely the same way of home-educating will tend to hang together and help each other out. But I think we

all recognise that in every single family, it is an entirely different appearance of education… **(Elaine, OM).**

Thus, if we position home-educators as practitioners, who are collectively engaged in the practice of home-education, Elaine's comment echo Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) theoretical presupposition. Specifically, that there can be economies of scale between what one could view as the localised practices of smaller clusters of families within a broader landscape of communities and networks; who collectively, constitute the social practice of home-education. Overtime, the shared experiences and histories fostered in localised regions of the landscape, serve to develop stronger allegiances. Consequently, some parents aligned their families practice more closely to some of the regions of the home-education landscape and not with others. However, finding a community of home-educating families whose intended pedagogical practice was best to the individual needs of each family was sometimes an arduous process. Jenny, an online moderator and home-educator for the past 5 years explained:

> [T]here isn't a home-education community because we are all here for very different reasons and take very different approaches… We are all driven by the same desires…we don't all do things in the same way, so you know, we don't have that connection that some very close home-educators do so… **(Jenny, home-educator).**

Moreover, Lorraine's remarks further substantiate that it was sometimes difficult as a home-educating parent to 'find' home-educators of a similar disposition:

> All home-educators have a very personal view of what they are trying to do…There are crossovers and when you think you might be doing it a similar way to someone else, you look at it a bit closer and then realise you don't. I think it is quite frustrating at first.… **(Lorraine, home-educator).**

Arguably, Lorraine's comments indicate that for some parents, simply having home-education in common was not always enough to foster strong modes of identification with one another (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner 2015). Pertinently, Kubiak et al. (2015), argued that managing multi-membership across more than one CoP can create personal and emotional difficulties. For instance, what might be deemed as appropriate and acceptable in one community, might be inappropriate or offensive in another (p.65). They go on to suggest that sources of *incongruence*, can facilitate a sense of unaligned engagement. This in turn, might affect the extent to which home-educators elect to participate in some groups and not in others. At this point, I should reiterate the formative nature of these suggestions. My arguments regarding identity and belonging in a landscape of home-education practice are properly developed in *Chapter nine*.

The sense in which home-educators whose children had additional needs was regarded as a strong source of i*ncongruence* among the parents interviewed in this study. As one online moderator (also

a home-educator) explained this was because these families required highly specialised social and practical resources to facilitate their family's engagement in home-education. In the online moderator's comments below, there is an explicit delineation between the fraction of home-educators to the perceived majority of 'normal' home-educating families:

> [T]he groupthink is that with children who have special needs and disabilities…the parents they feel that they are not like other home-educators who have normal children…The kids are very able, and although we have some people that are on both, because we do have some very able abled children… You know, those children are very able and they are very striving and they go on and they do all sorts of wonderful things… But most of the children in some of those families will never achieve that sort of thing **(OM).**

Moreover, Becky explained that this was why parents whose children have special education needs faced different challenges to families with 'normal children':

> [T]hey feel that their difficulties are different from other home-educators… So, a lot of the questions are about things like: "does anybody know about these drugs, or, how they are going to affect my child?" Or, "My son has just had an epileptic fit" … **(Becky, OM).**

At almost the entirely opposite ends of the spectrum of needs and interests Sam, who ran a 'co-operative' neighbourhood group for home-education families in her local area, explained she wanted her children (who are currently home-educated) to be able to build relationships with other families, and to provide them with the opportunity to engage in 'interesting' outdoor education activities with other families on a regular basis:

> Our ethos is, we do something every day, come and actually talk to us, come and meet us in person…. I prefer to see real people doing real things…I think that reflects what I want and what I want my children to have… we have got a sort of core group where most, people are very minimalist, very green… You know, we don't have cars we don't have flashy phones. I mean, we have quite a few families who are on very, very low incomes…. it is very much about face-to-face contact…it's about building relationships with people and seeing other families regularly and doing interesting stuff **(Sam, OM)**.

Moreover, Trish a home-educator, also affiliated with Sam's group, explains why meeting and doing things with similar families is important; assuming a sense of collective identity through multiple families 'being part of something', a group which shares a common identity and in some ways, Sam suggests, was like a school class:

> [W]e have got children who have stayed in their group, a mum said to us last week "Oh we have got that Green Co-operative identity now…We really feel that our son is part of the group". I think that is really important, for the children and parents to feel part of something… **(Trish, home-educator).**

> We really want our kids to grow up with a good set of friends…and now they almost have, well I don't want to say class, but I suppose it is the best way to describe it… **(Sam, OM).**

These findings highlight what could be conceptualised as an enterprise that different parents share in their collective pursuit of home-education (Wenger 198). At the same time, for some parents the different sensibilities of some home-educators, featured as a marker of identity that necessitated socialising with other 'like-minded' families to establish deeper and more meaningful social connections:

> [I]n an ideal world I think all of us would say we'd like to be friends with a wide range of people and that's important to us…home-educators like to mix with lots of people and …that's a really good opportunity for the children as well…but when you want to create deep relationships with people…what binds you together as Christians is quite important… I suppose in making you feel comfortable with each other…you know where you're coming from. Because a lot of us will then do occasional childcare for each other…you know that you've got those basic principles in common… **(Theresa, home-educator).**

When describing the common principles between Christians who home-educate, Theresa explains how parental attitudes towards disciple differ from home-education families who adopt an 'alternative lifestyle approach' to their style of home-education:

> There is a different feel and I think child discipline is probably dealt with in a different way in different families… Because I think Christian families generally, you know, support the belief that children should be disciplined to a certain level and the more alternative lifestyle people tend to be much freer with allowing children to… You know they have much wider boundaries on child behaviour I think which sometimes clashes… **(Theresa, home-educator).**

In this chapter, I have highlighted the characteristics and implied interests and needs upon which home-education families differ from one another. All though they possess unique experiences and ways of doing home-education, some families share mutual interests. This may be their child's needs and or parental ideologies, and/or other demographic characteristics. Further, the basis for mutual interests and needs, may be as broad as having home-education in common, or in being a single parent home-educator, as Becky explained. Moreover, Sam illustrated the need to enhance and develop the kind of minimalist lifestyle that she wanted her children to have. In this way, while parents share a perceived, somewhat abstracted affiliation with one and another through their shared pursuit of home-education, there exist important markers of identification and dis-identification among this population (Wenger 1998).

This research found that there were a host of perspectives, beliefs and experiences held by the survey respondents. It could therefore be argued that home-educators, engaged in the enterprise of home-education practice, possessed unique sensibilities and histories. In this way, sources of difference and similarity constituted a community of communities - of which I have suggested be

conceptualised as local regimes of competence (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner 2015). Therefore, if we position home-education as a social learning system, within which there are different domains of practice (some smaller and others larger), it is likely that, home-educators identify with some of these domains, and not with others. However, as I will demonstrate, when viewed from a wider vantage point, parents collectively share values and social positions. Thus, there are different economies of scale at play (Wenger 2010).

5.3   The shared enterprise of home-education

Evidently, if one was to classify home-educators based on their *localised practices* (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015), one would find the social and educational activities for home-educators and their families to be highly dissimilar. To use the metaphor of travelling to an alternative destination in education, some parents might organise themselves around the knowledge that a car is the best vessel to transport their family to this place. While, another parent might feel that that a train is better suited and so on and so forth. To continue with this metaphor, the following section will begin to flesh out the supposition that, although the home-educators sampled adopted different modes of transportation, ultimately their journeys were rooted to the same destination.

A lot has been said on the classification of groups in home-education (see *Chapter two*). Interestingly, few have explored the broader values and occupational positions of home-educating parents. Drawing on the survey data gathered in this study, I shed light on the parental occupational positions, levels of parental education and parental values towards home-education. In doing so, I identify similarities in the tentative observations made by English (2016); who interviewed a Muslim home-educating parent (see Section 2.5 for discussion). Subsequently, I show how the findings of this research support the proposition of home-education as a risk management strategy pertaining to a unique middle-class fraction. Further, I argue that it is a strategy that intends to cultivate strong, free and independent learners. Drawing on the original ideas of Wenger (1998), in the following section I conceptualise the overarching purpose of home-education as part of a broader shared-enterprise.

5.3.1   Social and occupational positions

The previous and/or current employment groups of survey respondents, alongside the survey data for the 200 respondents who cohabited with spouses and/or partners, illustrated that professional occupations were the largest group. Managerial (17.4) and Professional occupational groups (12.7) constitute 30% of those observed in the national population (The Census 2011). See Table 5.2.1a below:

Table 5.3.1a: Parental occupational positions (survey data)

Occupational group	Home-educators: previous/ or current employment	Cohabiting spouse/partner's current employment
Managers, Directors and Senior Officials	22 (9%)	42 (21%)
Professional Occupations	84 (36%)	78 (39%)
Associate Professional and Technical Occupations	16 (7%)	24 (12%)
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations	42 (18%)	6 (3%)
Skilled Trades Occupation	19 (8%)	28 (14%)
Caring, Leisure and Other Service Occupations	30 (13%)	9 (5%)
Sales and Customer Service Occupations	13 (6%)	4 (2%)
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	1 (<0%)	5 (3%)
Elementary Occupations	5 (2%)	4 (2%)
Total	**232 (100%)**	**200 (100%)**

Interestingly, managerial and professional occupational groups was twice as large (60%) among the occupations of partners. While this research did not examine household income, what this shows is that even though home-education families are represented across a range of occupational groups, they are over-represented in higher tiers of occupational social class. Social class itself is a complex and difficult to measure concept, which is not confined to occupational groups, but this suggests that the socio-economic positions among the home-education families profiled in this research are higher than those observed in previous research.

This study also found that the home-educators sampled in this research constitute a very highly-educated fraction of the general population (n=238). Of the 238 respondents, 93% had achieved 5 GCSE/O Level passes (grades A-C) or higher, a figure nearly three times higher than the 27% of the general population, while 36% had obtained a Higher BA/BSc education degree or equivalent, and a further 29% had obtained masters and/or doctoral degrees. Just 1% of respondents reported having obtained no qualifications, significantly lower than 22.7% of the population of England and Wales recorded in the 2011 Census. Table 5.2.1b illustrates this: (see footnotes for qualification levels key).

Table 5.3.1b: Qualification levels of home-educators

Qualification Levels	Count
Level 8: NVQ Level 5, Doctoral Degree (PhD), Level 8 Advanced Professional Diploma/Certificate/Award; highly specialised Diploma from a professional body (e.g. teaching, nursing or accountancy)	19
Level 7: Higher Degree (MA, MSc, MSci, PGCE, PGCert, PGDip), Advanced Professional Diploma/Certificate/Award, City & Guilds Membership, Cambridge ESOL	51
Level 6: Degree (BA, BSc), Advanced GNVQ, City and Guilds Graduateship, UEL Level Three, Graduate Diploma/ Certificate	86
Level 5: HND, HNC, Level 5 Professional Diploma/Certificate/Award, Foundation degree, Diploma of Higher Education, UEL Level 2	19
Level 4: NVQ Level 4, Certificate of Higher Education, City & Guilds Licentiateship, Level 4 Professional Diploma, BTEC Higher Nationals	18
Level 3: NVQ Level 3, AS/A Levels/VCEs, Intermediate GNVQ, City and Guilds Craft, BTEC National Award Diploma, Certificate, OCR Nationals, CACHE Diploma, RSA Diploma, Access to Higher Education Diploma	24
Level 2: NVQ Level 2, 5+ O levels(passes)/CSEs (grade 1)/GCSEs (grades A*-C), School Certificate, First Diploma, CACHE certificate, Foundation Apprenticeships	5
Level 1: NVQ Level 1, Foundation GNVQ, Basic Skills	1
Entry level: 1-4 O levels/CSEs/GCSEs (any grades), Entry Level, Foundation Diploma	6
No qualifications	3
Foreign qualifications	2
Other UK qualifications	4
Total	**238**

Based on these findings it could be inferred that possessing significantly higher than average levels of education situates these parents as part of a social group of individuals who collectively possess an abundance of cultural capital in its 'embodied state' (Jenkins 2002). Thus, the occupational positions and academic qualifications held means that collectively their dispositions are likely to reflect those of a middle-class fraction (Vincent and Ball 2006). Due to the methods used to obtain the sample however, I would strongly caution against generalising these findings to the characteristics of the wider population of home-education families - who may not, or chose not have access to the internet (see D'Arcy 2014). The complex and important impact of the internet and 'access' to communities that exist in home-education is developed in *Chapter seven*.

5.3.2 Responsibility for home-education

An area of similarity among the families profiled in my survey was parental employment and responsibility for home-education. The clear majority of survey respondents indicated that they

resided with a spouse and/or partner. Additionally, within most of these families, mothers were most likely to assume the main responsibility for home-education (a single survey respondent identified themselves as male). This typically involved changes to their economic activity, with the majority giving up work altogether. Of the 38 single parent households to feature in the survey sample, just over half worked part-time (20=53%), three were employed/self-employed on a full-time basis and 39% of families were not economically active. In contrast, among the 200 households with cohabiting couples, this figure was significantly lower, with just eight (4%) families indicating neither partner nor spouse was economically active. Of the 200 cohabiting parent families (96%) who were economically actively, 121 (60%) respondents indicated that one parent/spouse worked, while 79 (40%) indicated that both parents were economically active on a part-time and either/or full-time basis. Moreover, of the 212 participants who identified themselves as primarily responsible for home-education, 59% (124) identified themselves as economically inactive.

However, virtually all the survey respondents had previously been employed/self-employed on a full or part-time basis, while just four had never been in paid employment. Additionally, 42% had previously held positions in the top two occupational classes.

Of the 236 respondents who answered the question, 212 (90%) mothers indicated that they were primarily responsible for the previous and/or current home-education of their children, while one respondent indicated that she was a grandmother. A further three males identified themselves as primarily responsible. Thirteen (6%) females indicated that home-education was shared equally between themselves and their husband and/or partner. Of the remaining seven parents, five indicated that home-education was shared amongst the entire immediate family (including parents, siblings and learners themselves), while two described that home-education was shared between one parent and the guidance of private tutors.

Arguably, these findings demonstrate that the impact of home-educating on changing work patterns, or giving up work altogether, is a burden overwhelmingly assumed by women. This further substantiates Fortune-Wood's (2005) previous findings to suggest that: "women are eight times more likely than men to give up work to home-educate" (p.599). These findings thus further evidence that home-education is still markedly a gendered practice in that is predominantly facilitated by mothers (see Apple 2007; 2015).

5.3.3 Shared values, risk and adaptation

This section will outline a few overarching similarities in how the parents who responded to the survey identified what they felt was most important for their children to achieve. The parental

dispositions and familial experiences that underpin the reasons for home-education are discussed at length in *Chapter six*. When asked to think about what they valued most for their children when they grow up, respondents rated the prospect of good health, independence and fulfilling employment significantly higher than having a lot of money, or having good educational qualifications (Table 5.3.3.). [27]

Table 5.3.3: Goals for home-education

Achievement	The no. of respondents who ranked this achievement in their top three
1. *Good Health*	198
2. *Being independent*	148
3. *Having a fulfilling job*	125
4. *Having a good marriage or partnership*	104
5. *Having good friends*	102
6. *Good educational qualifications*	19
7. *Having children*	14
8. *Owning their own home*	2
9. *Having a lot of money*	1

It could be suggested that for these parents, the role of education is not intended as means to maximise their child's future command over economic resources (Brown 2011). Rather the prospect of good health, being independent and having a fulfilling job are more important. These findings support the observation made by Stevens (2001), who found that home-educators prioritised social rather than extrinsic educational outcomes.

Furthermore, the desire to cultivate happy, confident and independent learners who possessed a love for learning, critical thinking and an ethical sense of self was prevalent in across the 150 qualitative survey responses. Amidst these desires, home-education was constructed to achieve this through the various freedoms it offers for childhood learning. Across the 168 qualitative survey responses to Q54, 'freedom' was cited 66 times. This was followed by the other frequently

---

[27] Survey question 41: Below is a list of things that people value. Thinking about your children when they grow up, please select the three which you think will be the most important for them to have achieved:

mentioned terms to describe the purpose of home-education including choice, happiness, time, health and learning. Crucially, school was typically framed as a potential or actual risk to achieving this. As the following exerpts illustrate:

> First child had terrible experience at school… I was becoming increasingly worried about the system…I really wanted my children to value and enjoy education rather than being schooled to despise it… **(Respondent 45).**

> The wish to raise children to be strong, self-confident, ethical adults through a childhood where they are respected and have the opportunity to explore the world at their own pace… **(Respondent 31).**

> We wanted our children to grow up in a social environment. Schools create a bizarre model of society by placing 30-odd kids of the same age in a group together (where does that happen in the real world?!), and the opportunities for social contact are severely limited...**(Respondent 125).**

The general values visible across these data demonstrate that the parents in these families share similar values - which were rooted in their constructions of what they wanted for their children and who they wanted their children to 'become'. Moreover, the purpose of home-education was positioned with the desire to nurture the 'soft skills', and forms of learner identity perceived to be missing in schools.

The emphasis placed on the desire to nurture their happy and confident children, who were secure in expressing themselves, as independent problem solvers and able think critically, could be likened to Lareau's (2003) conceptualisation of *cultural enrichment*. Lareau (2003) argued that middle-class parents sought to extend their child's command of *cultural capital* through the provision of extra-curricular social opportunities. Using Bernstein's (1975a) *theory of educational transmissions*, one could extend this to suggest that values described by the parents who participated in this study exemplify the *expressive code* that home-educators intend to transmit to learners. I use the term *expressive code* loosely to refer to a cluster of values that are very much predicated on the high levels of social and cultural capital obtained through the education and occupational levels of said parents (Jenkins 1995).

Interestingly, rather than being comprised of 'getting ahead' and competition, the cultural logic among this class fraction was much more focused on the transmission of *soft skills* perceived and/or realised to be missing in schools (see: Brown 2011). However, these intentions were built upon the previous educational success of parents. Interestingly, these findings share similarity with the values observed by both English (2016) and Beck (2010), in that the motivations for home-education are an adaptive response to mitigate the riskiness of the school environment.

5.3.4 Social and cultural resources

This chapter has described the key demographics and the social characteristics of the home-education families sampled in this research. Thus, far, it has been shown that the home-educators constituted a social group who possessed significantly higher occupational positions and educational levels than those of the average population. While these families shared socio-economic similarities with one another, they also possessed different experiences, attitudes and values towards how and why they practice this education alternative.

However, home-educating parents face several distinct challenges for the intended transmission of social values to home-educated learners (Bernstein 1975). Yet, the provision of highly-individualised programmes of provision tailored to the unique needs of learners necessitates high levels of cultural, social and economic capital (Jenkins 1995). As illustrated earlier in my discussion, because of their entry into home-education, some families faced a decreased command of economic capital due to the implied losses associated with a parent giving up work. This, coupled with the heterogeneous nature of the population sampled, elevated the need to harness social capital to provide *enrichment activities* (Lareau 2003) for home-educated learners.

I have also suggested that home-education is a vessel through which these parents intended to provide their children with a tailor made, freer and happier form of educational provision. These values echo the broader observations noted by Pattison and Thomas (2007) in relation to 'desiring differently'. The authors described how the home-educators interviewed in their research positioned home-education as both *better* and *different* to school. To use Pattison's (2015) typology, to enact a mix of 'better' and 'different', home-educators must construct more specialised *domains* to achieve this (Wenger 2010). By domain, I am referring to Wenger's (2010) description of:

> "[a] community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people. (You could belong to the same network as someone and never know it.) The domain is not necessarily something recognised as "expertise" outside the community" (no page number).

In recourse of this argument, the remainder of this chapter concentrates on the ways in which home-educators have appropriated Yahoo! and Facebook groups to cultivate the *competency* of specialist *domains* of interest (Wenger 2010). In doing so, I set out how technologies may have changed the kinds of communities practice previously researched in home-education (see Safran 2008).

5.4   New technologies used in home-education

Home-educators utilised a range of different technologies to support some of the distinct interests and needs outlined in Section 5.2. While the following discussion predominantly focuses on the technologies of Yahoo! and Facebook, the use of multiple forms of platforms such as, YouTube, Twitter, blogs and wiki pages were also used. See Table 5.4a below:

Table 5.4a: New technologies and use

Type of internet technology/social media	Home-education	General
Social networking sites e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Bebo	133	184
Video sharing e.g. YouTube, Vimeo	134	134
Podcasting e.g. SoundCloud, Audible	26	33
Social bookmarking e.g. Pinterest, Reddit, Digg	54	63
Online discussion boards e.g. Yahoo! Question & Answers, AllExperts	94	68
Instant messaging e.g. Windows Live Messenger, Blackberry Messenger, WhatsApp	14	65
Blogs e.g. Wordpress, Tumblr	93	89
Wikis e.g. WikiEducator, WikiAnswers	113	88
Video conferencing e.g. Skype, Emeet.me, Google Hangouts	37	86
Forums & Web Chat Rooms e.g. Yahoo! Groups, Spinchat	156	68
Photo sharing e.g. Instagram, Flickr	34	80
3D Virtual worlds e.g. Second Life, Active Worlds, Blue Mars	14	10
Online Gaming	60	77

Furthermore, the survey data also indicate that these new technologies are used to support a variety of activities such as sharing advice, campaigning, and generating resources under the umbrella of home-education (n=238). See Table 5.4b below for further details of these platforms:

Table 5.4b: New technologies used for home-education

Use of online media technologies for home-education	Count
Sharing/finding educational resources	223
Meeting other home-educators	217
Organising/finding out about home-education events	208
Seeking advice from other home-educators	191
Socialising with friends/ maintaining friendships	158
Planning/delivering learning activities	146
Discussing home-schooling rationales, practices and/or methods with others	146
Promoting/campaigning for home-education	91
Generating resources for home-schooling e.g. making videos, writing blogs	83
Learning online in a 'virtual classroom'	58

Evidently, the survey data show that forums and web chat rooms such as Yahoo! and Facebook groups were the most commonly used.

In response to the question "are you a member of any national, regional and/or local community support groups for home-education?" (n=237), 178 (75%), said yes, while 59 (25%) said no (see Appx. 1 for full details). The 168 respondents cited 240 different formal and informal organisations - including a variety of national, regional and local groups (see *Chapter Three* details). This might indicate that parental membership and/or explicit affiliation to communities, groups and larger organisations is diffuse with parents participating in more than one group. I develop this proposition further in *Chapter eight*- where I discuss identity work amidst the nexus of multi-membership (Wenger 2010).

5.5 Extending communities and creating new ones

In the following section, I explain the ways in which the acquisition of new technologies in home-education has led to the extension off communities and the creation of new ones.

My initial online searches and later discussions with participants revealed many differences in the kinds of offline groups intended to support home-education practices. These features included:

- size - the number of parents registered to the group;
- when the group was set up online (lesser established/well-known groups);
- who the group was set up by;
- the online activity levels of the group - how frequently members communicate with one another;
- the locality of the population they intend to support;
- the intended purpose of the group;
- the aspect of home-education practice the group intends to support;
- the nature of support provided: informational, emotional, social etc.;
- the kinds of parents it intends to support;
- the ages and educational stages of children that the group tends to support;
- the commonalities and differences between members who participate;
- the rules and regulations;
- the levels of moderation;
- forms of membership approval;
- spaces of communication (online/offline).

Some respondents explicitly listed various Yahoo! and Facebook groups, while others mentioned home-education groups, which regularly met offline. Furthermore, the interviews with parents and home-educated children and young people highlighted that these families typically utilised multiple

and numerous platforms for a variety of purposes. The landscape of networks and communities in home-education is complex and continually transformative. This was reflected in the participation of families across different points in their journey to an alternative destination in education. The features and implications of this are discussed in *Chapter seven*.

For the purposes of this analysis, I refer to the collection of these different online networks and communities as a LoP (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). The basis for this proposition will be substantiated as my analysis progresses. This concept originates in Wenger's (1998) earlier work on Communities of Practice (*see Chapter four*). A framework within which 'practice' can be defined as:

> "It is doing in a historical and social context that gives structure and meaning to what we do...such a concept of practice includes both the explicit and the tacit. It includes what is said and what is left unsaid; what is represented and what is assumed. It includes the language, tools, documents, images, symbols, well-defined roles, specified criteria, codified procedures, regulations, and contractions that various practices make explicit for a variety of purposes" (p.20)

The LoP framework recognises that, as individuals, our affiliation to and membership of communities and groups alters across different points during the life course.

Furthermore, an individual's multi-membership means that communities and networks of practice do not exist in a vacuum. Often, we are members of more than one community of practice. This LoP (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015) is further complicated if one considers the potential existence of *constellations of practice* (Wenger 1998) which encompasses groups which are less clearly defined, but may enable social learning, despite not fully resembling a CoP.

When I use the term 'landscape of home-education practice' in this thesis, I am therefore referring to the array of different online networks and offline communities that mutually constitute what home-education is and how it is achieved. As a community evolves, they come to acquire and develop ways of organising their domain (Wenger 2010). In the following discussion, I describe some of the kinds of signs, symbols and roles that have been translated into the some of the online spaces of Yahoo! and Facebook intended to support strands of home-education practice. This, I go on to suggest may point towards the possible generation of new structures among different collections of families.

5.5.1 Boundary making

In attempting to co-ordinate and establish their competency, home-educators have utilised new technologies precisely because of unique differences and shared similarities identified earlier in this chapter. Kubiak et al. (2015) explained:

> "The tensions created by bringing people together who identify with and feel accountable to different Communities of Practice are common. The good will which brings a group together can often mask significant differences in assumptions, ways of thinking and use of language. The group's potential power can only be realised if it establishes are shared focus and coordinated effort…" (Kubiak et al. 2015, p68).

Wenger (1998) remarks that a CoP can *reify* its boundary through adopting explicit markers of membership which signal allegiance to a structure or organisation including: 'titles, dress and initiation rites' (p.104). However, the way in which these affect participation and non-participation are central to the degree to which a 'boundary' can be said to exist (Wenger 2010). In *Chapter seven*, I explain in greater detail the ways in which the explicit and tacit mechanisms adopted in the online landscape affect participation among the members of these groups. The findings here, however, draw attention to some of the more visible mechanisms and practices that signify a process of demarcation, or boundary making, in the online landscape (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

Using Facebook and Yahoo!, home-educators are now able to visibly display markers and signs in the form of group titles and information pages. In some ways, the group titles and descriptions pages could be conceptualised as signs and symbols that reflect the shared histories and repertoires of different practices in the landscape (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). The following excerpts from different Yahoo! and Facebook sites provide just a few illustrations of this:

'UK Home-education and LAs - help with officialdom': Facebook group

"We encourage the sharing of stories and resources, asking for support, discussions on LA's, plus general home ed (sometimes not) related conversations"

'UK home ed. Veterans': Facebook group

"This is a whole UK group who invite members to join from known Home-educators who have more than 5 years' experience in the field. This does not preclude parents or guardians who are home-educating small people but we expect they have gone through the process with older siblings."

'Pagan Home-educators UK': Facebook group

"There are many Home-education groups out there, many dedicated to various strands of Home-education and belief systems in the UK, but not a single one for Pagan Home-educators in the UK. I thought it would be nice to have a space where we can share related links of interest as well as offer

---

Herts HE: Yahoo! group

"Welcome to the Herts HE Yahoo! group. This group is for families in or near Hertfordshire, who are home-educating or just embarking on it. Its purpose is to provide a space for discussion, practical support and information sharing, in order to create a supportive networking community for the benefit of our children's education."

The Herts HE Yahoo! group offers:
An EMAIL LIST for discussion and support and the sharing of ideas, experiences, contacts, links and other events in the area
* A CALENDAR of regular and one-off events organised by the home-educating families in Herts
* A FILES section of useful resources
* A PHOTOS section where we can share photographs
* A LINKS section where anyone can post links to useful websites, or to our children's websites
* A DATABASE section where you can give and search for more information on your home ed and other interests
* A place to swap, sell or recycle

HE-MK: Yahoo! Group

"Free Range Education, although based in Milton Keynes, runs educational events for home-educated children in MK and at various locations around the country."

"This list acts more like a mailing list than a chat group. All the activities that I organise are available to book via the Free Range Education website at www.freerangeeducation.org. You need to be a member of this group/mailing list to access the activities on the website, this ensures that you receive all the information related to an activity, along with reminders, any urgent changes to an event and links for follow-up activities."

Using the data obtained from the profiling exercise (see *Chapter three*), the title and informational pages of Yahoo! and Facebook groups were arranged into the following themes (see Table 5.5.1):

Table 5.5.1 Yahoo! and Facebook groups for home-education: key themes

Ideology and educational practices of families	Demographic characteristics	Intended group activity
Examples: • **Type of home-education philosophy, method, approach, curriculum**	Examples: • Locality: The UK, regional, local • Children with special educational needs	Examples: • Activism/campaigning • Resource sharing • Generating artefacts: group colanders

• **National curriculum-assessment** • **The way in which they are run offline (co-operative)** • **The religious beliefs** • **Local authorities** • **Particular task and or class focused on a task offline**	• Age of home-educated children • Number of years in home-education • Parent status (single parents) • Number of years in home-education • The ethnicity of home-educators/and their families	• Organising social and/or education events and activities for families offline • Social support socialising with other parents online • Resources - sharing free resources

One could infer that the symbolic function of such pages is to direct participation towards alignment to a regime *of competence* in what is a dynamic landscape of home-education practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). The effect of boundary making in relation to what Wenger (1998) would describe as identities of non-participation is developed in *Chapter six*.

As a few examples of the interlinkage between the three themes of differentiation, one of the participants interviewed moderated a Yahoo! group intended to support single parents across the UK who were seriously considering home-education. The group's information page did not state a specific activity that it intended to support other than 'general information and discussion'. This is an example of space that is likely to support a differentiated group of parents.

One of the online moderators interviewed had set up an invitation-only Facebook group to support 30 Christian home-education families living in South West England. The nature of this group is likely to reflect a more socially *stratified* space. Based on this, it could be inferred the greater number of characteristics across the themes of 'ideology', 'demographics' and 'intended group activity' the more likely the online space is to support what Bernstein (1975) might conceive of as a *stratified* system (see *Chapter four* for a recap). It follows that the fewer explicitly defined characteristics, the less likely that these online spaces are to support a *differentiated* group. Suppose that an online moderator created a Facebook group for Pagan home-educating families living in the North East of England and whose children were under 5 years of age. The population supported by this Facebook group is likely to be a stratified group, in that the characteristics of families are relatively fixed (i.e. locality, ages of children, religious belief). In contrast, a Yahoo! group open to the all home-educators residing in the UK dedicated to discussing any matters relating to home-education, is likely to support a more differentiated population (i.e. characteristics of this group are transient and members are likely to have a range of beliefs etc.).

The platforms of Yahoo! And Facebook have enabled different home-educating groups to display signs and markers that symbolically function as markers of allegiance. Moreover, through the

process of searching for and applying to join, these signs and symbols serve to explicitly separate *legitimate* from *illegitimate* members of the group (Wenger 1998). However, the exact criteria required to become a legitimate member of a community varied from group to group. As Sharon explained:

> Some insist that you have to be personally vouched for by other members of the same group. Some insist that you live in the same locale or follow the same ethos / faith / spiritual leanings / type of home-education…**(Sharon, OM)**.

Due to the high levels of commitment associated with participation in the local co-operative group co-run by Sam, their Yahoo! group's information page asks that any parents (and families) who are interested in joining the group, need to attend three meetings offline before being able to access their Yahoo! domain. She remarked why this important to ensure the success of this group:

> If they want to join the group new people have to agree to the guidelines of the group, which are… I mean, there's quite a lot… But it's mostly common sense to be honest. It's things like, parents are responsible for their own children, we like people to contribute in some way to the group because it is a co-operative group... Our Yahoo! group is very much for organising get-togethers…for some people, that is not their cup of tea…**(Sam, OM)**.

Furthermore, Georgina who moderated a small Facebook group to support six other local home-education families in providing a study style history group explained that to participate in this space, you must receive an invitation:

> Partly it was to keep numbers down. I felt that if the group was too big, then all of the children don't get enough time and then they get bored. We have got nine children and that is just about okay in two hours. Each child can get through their session and pay attention to everyone else's. More children than that [and] it wouldn't work…**(Georgina, OM).**

Arguably, these examples highlight how some groups use criteria to ensure engagement and commitment. Thus, in communicating the parameters, online moderators could ensure that the joint enterprise of a community is mutually constituted. If some groups did not set explicit criteria, this would be significantly harder to achieve. As Georgina illustrated:

> The other reason I did it as a closed group is within the home-education world, there are continually problems with people saying yes they will do something. A lot of people have a terrible habit of seeing something is coming up saying that they will go to it and then never turning up, or pulling their weight. So, by making it I have control who's in it, and if I felt anybody was pulling their weight I could chuck them out **(Georgina OM).**

As learning communities expand, extend and split, Wenger (2010) explains that the domain of practice must remain a relevant priority to its members. Importantly, parents who participate must see the value and worth in doing so. Successful engagement requires members to feel that they are getting something new out of the domain. Consequently, one could infer that the more exclusive

the group, the higher the degree of commitment. Alternatively, the more open a group, the looser the ties and commitment the joint enterprise and levels of trust.

5.5.2 Group roles

In the interviews with 11 online moderators and three home-educators (who, as it transpired, were also moderators of an online Yahoo! and/or Facebook group intended to support home-education) a common theme emerged with regards to trust. The participants who set up the Facebook and/or Yahoo! group, or who inherited moderation responsibilities from previous moderators, were typically well-established 'home-educators'. In other words, they were experienced in terms of the number of years in home-education and well known in the 'home-education world' offline. Their role as moderator hinged on previously gaining the acceptance and trust of the home-educators the group intended to support.

> I had set up a home-education group in real life and people knew me and trusted me… Home-education works on trust very much, because people knew who I was, I got invitations to moderate… **(Elaine, OM).**

Boundary managers commonly have a vested interest in the success of the group, in terms delivering the intended purpose of the group itself. Typically, these members played an active role in generating content, and in organised and contributing to discussions. As several moderators explained:

> I do a lot of answering queries from new members. We have a welcome letter, which has as much information on it as we could possibly put in about national groups, websites, blogs, things that people found useful as well as all of the activities we run, and we include a link to an invitation to a Yahoo! group which people can apply to join…. there is a limit, to how much we can police the membership process. We rely a lot of people be honest. It is a network, more than providing a service. It is a network of families (**Alexa, OM).**

> I see myself as the social organiser, official photographer at our home ed. functions, and you just post things to keep it alive and going… **(Christie, OM).**

> I am the one who chooses the topic each month…I manage things like the timetable of when we are meeting and what topics we are going to do and answering anybody's queries if they have them... **(Georgina, OM).**

Online moderators were also fully committed to the project of home-education. This was particularly visible in the rationales to underpin 'throwing themselves' into organising and providing social and enriching opportunities for their children. This was a theme particularly visible in the accounts of how parents came to assume the role of a moderator. In this respect, you could infer these parents possess an inbound trajectory in terms of their relation to other members of the group. They are more likely to represent fully-fledged members of the online and offline community. More broadly, this echoes Storck and Storck's (2004) analysis of the role of the important role of trust and

leadership within dispersed online communities. Crucially, they highlight that trust itself is multifaceted. The leaders of such groups require winning the confidence of members to successfully preserve the tradition of the group. Moreover, the authors assert, it is therefore an essential ingredient towards the group's successfully generating social capital (Storck and Storck, 2004).

In addition to being primarily responsible for approving requests to join the group, Yahoo! and Facebook also empower online moderators primarily with the responsibilities of regulating the flow and content of the kinds of information exchanged between members of the online space. Sharon humorously showed:

> I run the group as a benevolent dictator. I am also the list owner. One other member looks after the payments and I ask others from time to time to help with specific tasks as the group has now increased to 460 families so can be difficult to keep on top of everything **(Sharon, OM).**

Keeping discussions 'on topic', and/or online with the intended purpose of the group is arguably another way in which online moderators can be seen to act as 'boundary managers'. As several moderators illustrated:

> [W]e try and keep the group as informal as possible because we want to be it a community, rather than a lead sort of thing…I am made aware if there are any issues… **(Alexa, OM).**

Additionally, Sam highlighted:

> Sam (OM): They can message whatever they want. I mean, obviously, we're keeping an eye on it. So, if it's offensive anything we could take it down, but I mean they wouldn't tend to be… **(Sam, OM).**

Furthermore, Elaine and Lorraine explained:

> You just sort of look at the messages before they go out. The group that I set up is very tightly moderated, nothing gets through without my say-so. But some of the other groups are quite lax and it is just a matter of overseeing…just making sure that nothing is kicking off and people aren't actually killing each other **(Elaine, OM).**

> My role is only really, calming any arguments… The unspoken guideline agreed between moderators is that it's not a forum for arguments and it isn't a forum for lots of personal type of emails, you know like meet you at the park Suzie sort of thing because it just gets in the way of other things **(Lorraine, OM).**

The role of the online leadership described here, Storck and Storck (2004) suggested, can prove problematic for the democracy and innovativeness of online networks and communities. In their analysis of a large dispersed electronic network of practice, they highlighted that the leaders of such groups are not democratically elected. Their position and agency afforded through these online spaces can result in content that skewed towards their own interests.

The third type of member described in the online moderator's accounts of their group's online practices was that of the *broker* (Wenger 1998). This was often undertaken by an experienced home-educator, whose children were likely to grow up and 'moved on' from home-education. Despite no longer 'needing' support for home-education themselves, out of a sense of reciprocity, these parents were motivated to continue to participate in the group. Their participation was typically 'waiting in the foreground' and on hand to offer advice to new parents joining the group. Several brokers, described the needs to 'give something back' to keep the group going. As Kim illustrated:

> We stopped home-educating last year when my daughter went to college… I joined the Yahoo! Groups in the early days…I've spent a lot of time answering people's questions over the years and giving back a bit… **(Kim, OM).**

This might suggest that the relative position of brokers towards the *shared enterprise* of home-education is at an *outbound*, rather than *inbound* position (Wenger 1998). In other words, these parents no longer participated in home-education to benefit their needs- instead they continued to participate through a sense of reciprocity.

Additionally, numerous online moderators and home-educators, used the term 'lurking' and 'lurkers' to describe forms of non-participation of some members online (Wenger 1998). As Georgina remarked:

> One of the advantages of an email group and a Facebook group is that you can lurk. You can join and not actually post anything, but you can see the kind of traffic that is happening… You can always spot the newbies. Give it two years and most people end up with a good group of friends who you can actually talk face-to-face with… **Georgina (OM).**

Typically, the nature of participation in the online groups was characterised by 'watching' and/or 'listening' to the nature of email traffic exchanged between other group members rather than explicitly contributing towards the online 'talk' taking place within the group. Lurking was a role typically occupied by 'newbies' - or recent members to join the group. These members were often parents who were considering, or who had only recently made the decision to home-educate (Wenger 1998). In *Chapter six*, I demonstrate the ways in which this mode of engagement helps to socialise new parents into the unspoken rules and norms of home-education of communities.

5.6 Heterogeneous collections of like-minded parents?

The effects of the appropriation of new technologies have meant that in home-education, there exist much bigger networks of families than was previously possible. In this respect, members who join these kinds of groups have access to a wider 'pool' of knowledge and perspectives. As several parents illustrated:

Online you get a wider range of people and people who you will never meet face-to-face. That's the thing, because we were also separated. In any one town there are not that many home-educators. But online you can be in contact with 200. You have a greater variety and more people who can help. Think as a parent you tend to know parents whose children are roughly the same age as yours, and online you will know a far greater range…**(Lorraine, OM).**

Furthermore, the some of the online groups dedicated to supporting families, who may have difficulties travelling, the ability to communicate without with like-minded parents without the need for meeting offline. As Becky outlined:

[B]ecause there are niche groups and there are national groups online… You can tap into a lot of people that you wouldn't have been able to meet personally and locally…**(Becky, OM).**

Harriet elaborates on what the possibility of forming international networks and virtual meeting points could mean for home-education:

[T]hey might enable people to form groups where meeting in person isn't necessary. I'm thinking about my situation, and the extra limitations that you have when you home-educate a severely disabled child. It means that you can't always attend meetings in person, so forums and online staff would enable virtual meetings **(Harriet, home-educator).**

These findings suggest that new technologies may have given rise to bridging capital, between the pre-existing and newly emerging networks intended to support home-education. Moreover, the challenges of finding a network of families; with whom parents are likely to share commonalities or mutual interests would previously have been difficult. As Lorraine explains:

…[H]ow on earth would you find them! What do you do, put a notice up at the newsagents? It has been really crucial for people getting in touch with each other and then the momentum builds when they realise there are so many people out there…it's self-perpetuating…We are known and we have a point of contact. No one would want to give up their phone number so it is good with email because it is a very neutral point of contact where you can get quick responses **(Lorraine, OM).**

The significance of this for home-education may have helped to facilitate the existence of more specialist networks of practice. As Georgina explained:

It's interesting because Facebook is now starting having both kinds of groups as well, which you have to post an invitation and the moderators choose whether or not to let you in. With Facebook we are now getting replicates of the Yahoo! Groups and the networks are being split. I find I now have to go to my emails and Facebook to make sure I am not missing anything…Spaces are being created within social media, where it is safe to ask for advice, information, and support **(Georgina, OM).**

At the same time, the increased bonding of capital that may be enabled through boundary making among some groups, may further lead to the fracturing of the online landscape, as families who share particularly close interests, ideas and interests from their networks.[28] Kim remarked:

> …You get flame wars on a Yahoo! list...you know when somebody says something and then a load of other people all flame them and say 'oh no that is wrong!', and having big rows on the list. It happens in every group I have ever been on…and then you will get some who says 'right well we will have a group of people who think like us,' so they set up a new group and so you end up with hundreds of lists **(Kim, home-educator).**

Thus, while some groups in home-education might share a strong degree of commonality and shared enterprise, this might have come at the expense of weakened bridging capital, meaning that some groups may have paradoxically become more insulated from each other's practice. I consider this further in the next chapter (*Chapter six*).

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the nexus of parental perspectives, family characteristics, curricular and approaches that inform diverse ways of doing home-education. Regarding relevant literature and aspects of CoP theory (Wenger 1998) and the LoP framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015), I suggested that the findings point towards the existence of localised regimes of competence in home-education. I demonstrated that the differential interests and needs of these families acts as an important source of differentiation within what is a diverse landscape of practice - and one that has previously informed the formation of unique Communities of Practice in home-education (Safran 2008). As a social group however, I argued that the parents in these families possessed a diverse and rich source of cultural capital. There are shared overarching values, evident in ways in which they articulated what they want their family's practice of home-education to achieve. Crucially, I suggested that not only is there a shared enterprise among what could be regarded as the pursuit of ideologically disparate local home-education practices, but that this broader enterprise is rooted in social principles. Thus, on a local level the practices that home-education families jointly pursue is highly dissimilar, however parents share overarching sources of common interest through their broader enterprise of 'home-education practice'. In the common pursuit of home-education, I described how some home-educators have colonised new technologies to create new communities and extend old ones to support their local practice. I concluded that the acquisition of these technologies has augmented what is now a diverse and highly complex landscape of both online and offline networks and communities in home-education.

---

[28] For a description of bridging and bonding capital please refer to *Chapter four*.

Chapter 6 : Breaking Badman, social networking and the making of new divisions

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I concentrate on the orchestration of a national campaign levied against the proposals made in the *Badman Review of Elective Home-education* in England during 2009-2010. This was a critical moment for home-education. It mobilised home-educators, advocates and key stakeholders across England and neighbouring countries on a large scale (Pattison 2010). Drawing on the interview accounts of online moderators and home-educators, I explain how new technologies were used to create multiple networks of practice. With reference to concepts originating from the CoP model (Wenger 1998) and Bernsteinian ideas (1975a) (outlined in *Chapter four*), I describe the relations and boundaries articulated by home-educators who participated in these networks of practice at the time. I explain how this collective online participation served to empower and align home-educators with different perspectives and beliefs in a way that was not possible before. Using this case, I argue that new technologies supported a symbolic challenge against the misrecognition and marginalisation of home-education. Equally, I also consider some of the challenges that new technologies presented for home-education communities during and after the Badman campaign. More specifically, I illustrate the power relations that shaped some of the communicative practices between home-educators. In doing so, I surface how the creation of networks of practice in home-education paradoxically strengthened the ideological divides between home-educators as much as they intended to cross them. With reference to the previous empirical chapter (*Chapter five*), I suggest that the 'dividing function' of new technologies might undermine the social values that underpin the shared enterprise of home-education.

6.2 Reactions to Badman

In *Chapter two* I described some of the issues and dilemmas to emerge in response to *Badman Review* (2009)[29]. This study found that, of participants who were home-educating around the time of the Badman era, several reacted negatively towards some of the recommendations presented in the report. In particular, participants referred to the following themes:

- The weak evidence base; in particular, the implied causal connection between home-educating and being 'known to social services';

---

[29] To briefly recap, the Badman Review (2009) was a piece of research carried out by Graham Badman. The recommendations included the implementation of a compulsory registration system for home-educating families in England.

- The framing of education as synonymous with more formal approaches towards learning and the subsequent lack of representation of families who pursue autonomous styles of home-education;

- The portrayal of home-education as an inherent issue of child safety, characterised by elevated levels of risk.

While most my participants expressed dismay at the weak evidence and assumptions made about home-education in the *Badman Review*, a significant number did not condemn outright the possibility of a registration system in home-education. Two parents indicated some form of regulation as a welcome development. This is important because Stafford (2012), asserted that most home-educators were in opposition to the proposals. However, the absence of comprehensive data limits the capacity for any interested party to describe the position of the majority, simply because we do not know how many families home-educate in England, let alone in Britain. Therefore, I do not wish to imply that the accounts discussed in this research represent the views of a majority. Instead, I focus on the interactions between home-educators and the unintended consequences of this for the knowledge that is available to new families online.

6.2.1 Weak evidence, conspiracy and parental choice

A few participants felt that the evidence presented by Badman (2009) was intentionally skewed to conflate the risks of home-education. This was perceived as the product of a wider political conspiracy to 'control' the population of home-educating families. As Gwen, an online moderator illustrates:

> The Badman report was a bit of a hatchet job…his recommendations were that we should automatically be put under the surveillance of social services…For a fairly low-risk population, it was quite excessive really… **(Gwen, OM).**

Gwen's remarks illustrate the sense in which some parents felt that, as a group, home-educators were being unfairly targeted and viewed with suspicion. Moreover, Sharon explained why she felt the report was not impartial:

> Now completely discredited by the Government ministers that commissioned it, Graham Badman, hardly a neutral figure…was paid a serious amount of money to try and find out if home-education was a front for forced marriage, child abuse or child labour…despite finding not a shred of evidence for any of the accusations he then started to try and find evidence… **(Sharon, OM).**

Sharon went on to comment:

> [I]t made it sound very sinister...I take grave exception to manipulating the figures to make a case that didn't exist… **(Sharon, OM).**

The comments made by Sharon echo the sentiment asserted by Rothermel (2011) who highlighted the weak evidence base upon which the Badman recommendations were drawn.

Some of the interview accounts were linked to attitudes towards what the state's involvement in education 'should be' and the rights of parents more generally. This was evident when a few participants likened home-education to a 'parental' choice, akin to decisions such as whether to vaccinate a child. For example, when recalling a conversation with a neighbour, Nicky remarked:

> [O]ne of my neighbours said 'well I know you are fine, but what about some families who are not fine'…I said to her, well it is a parental thing…you wouldn't have a register for parents who gave their children Calpol… **(Nicky, home-educator).**

Views such as the one expressed by Nicky above, infer the prioritisation of parental choice and a strong commitment to the private lives of families. In this way, the *Badman Review* epitomised a threat to the perceived values and freedoms of some parents. Thus, some home-educators felt that they had a lot to lose should the proposed legislative changes been passed (see *Chapter two* for a summary). Precisely where the balance of power should fall within the trio of parental rights, the role of the state and the rights of children is an inherently disputed issue, not just in home-education (see Conroy 2010; Kunzman 2012), but in the field of education research more generally (see Brown 2011). The findings of this research echo the contentious nature of this issue and subsequently how some members of the public can come to place themselves at odds with the perspectives of legislators and policy makers.

6.3 Disenfranchised voices

A theme observed in the interview accounts was the sense in which parents felt stereotyped and, in a few instances, persecuted because of a generalised culture of non-representation, mystification and negativity. This culture was evident in the ways in which home-education was represented in news and media reports, the views of politicians, government officials and through individual exchanges with members of the public, family members, friends and peers. For example, several home-educators remarked that national news coverage tended to portray home-education negatively:

> [S]ometimes we are portrayed as psychopaths… hippies, or devout religious people, weirdos really… **(Hayleigh, home-educator).**

Moreover, Nicky explains the 'cultural lens' through which home-educators are somewhat invisible to the public. Consequently, she points out, so are some of the alternative pedagogies practised by home-education families:

> [N]ewspapers tend to represent home-educators as mad, child abusers. Or as a terribly bad thing for hippies, or as hot-housing… I think because school education is so deeply culturally embedded it is very difficult for people to even realise that they are seeing things through a cultural light, like a cultural glass… **(Nicky, home-educator).**

However, one online moderator inferred that some of the critiques levelled at home-education were warranted:

> Not all home-education is good… sometimes when there has been something negative about home-education, you think well…that's actually quite fair comment…I think that it really upsets home-educators to see anything negative at all about home-education, because they see it all as a very positive thing… **(Becky, OM).**

Additionally, Rosa elaborated:

> I've got friends of mine…who know families that aren't part of the regular home-education community…some of them are very problematic families as well. They are hidden, some of them are very religious, some of them have problems…drug use, alcoholism…the travelling community... All of these people are never represented in the main body of home-educators **(Rosa, home-educator).**

However, during the *Badman Review* several parents indicated that media coverage was rife with 'nasty' and 'upsetting' portrayals of home-educators and home-education. For example, at the time Vicky felt that the negative culture of news media coverage fuelled the Government's fears and provided them with an easy group to scapegoat:

> [T]he way home-education was being portrayed was horrific. We were made out to be horrible child abusers who lock away our children…the media have this culture…they look for something or someone to blame… **(Vicky, home-educator).**

Interestingly, several participants felt that autonomous approaches were not recognised as a valid approach to education. As Grace explains:

> A lot of what Graham Badman was saying, you know having consulted with home-educators, he didn't. The only one he consulted was Simon Webb. Simon Webb is all about structured education only. He doesn't believe in autonomous education…[Y]ou don't have to be sitting at a school desk to become successful… and that's why people got quite cross because Simon Webb tried to speak on behalf of the whole home-educating community in the *Badman Review*…. **(Grace, home-educator).**

While critical of the weak evidence base and biases against home-education expressed in the *Badman Review*, some home-educators explained that they were not directly in opposition to the idea of some form of a registration system for home-education families. However, their concerns lay more with the lack of training and perceived biases towards conventional methods of formal learning that would negatively influence the implementation of such a system. The potential negatives of this for parents outweighed the potential gains of being known to their LA (if they were not already known). As Claudia explained:

> [Y]ou get some people that are just really unrealistic, and they want the government to give us money to home-educate our kids but then not have any say over how we spend it or what was supposed to be happening, or monitoring quality control. Then there are other people who just want to criticise... if there's anything to give home-education a bad name to get people worried, it's refusing to let people into your home and refusing to let them see your children… **(Claudia, OM).**

The findings the Badman Review (2009) signified what Conroy (2010) described a populist political turn- which unfairly elevated home-education as an inherently risky and unknown threat to the safeguarding of children. It follows that home-education challenges the governmental surveillance mechanism of 'school' provision (Conroy, 2010). Arguably, the findings of this research are limited in substantiating such suggestions. However, this is not to underplay the consequences of reactive policymaking. It is fair to suggest that the *Badman Review* yielded a symbolic effect in terms of exacerbating and bringing to the fore the sense of vulnerability, subordination and alienation felt by some home-educators. This is significant because as Pattison (2012) argues, prejudice and rumours do not serve a helpful purpose for policy makers, nor the advocates forging a path towards social justice and recognition. Viewed alongside the evidence presented in this study, it could be inferred that the *Badman Review*, amplified and exacerbated the subordinate status of home-educators, as evident in the perceived powerlessness of some parents who, for instance, practised more autonomous home-education approaches.

6.3.1 *Fear and vulnerability*

While their views on the *Badman Review* differed, for several participants the possibility of legislative changes to home-education conjured a tangible sense of apprehension and fear. Many parents described this as a worrying and challenging time for home-education in England. As one home-educated young person recalled:

> There was that really horrible thing, the Badman report…Inspectors could come around unannounced and observe your education and could interview the child without their parents present…He tried to pass that bill so you could do that... There was a big thing going on about in the news, it was really scary… **(Stephanie, home-educated teen).**

Moreover, Nicky remarked:

> The whole thing made me feel sick to my stomach, it was just horrible. I felt very frightened… **(Nicky, home-educator).**

The sense of anxiety and fear articulated by some parents was compounded by the ideologically disparate nature of the home-educating population. As an illustration, Jenny remarked:

> [W]e are a politically vulnerable group because we haven't got that homogeneity, so we are always quite vulnerable… **(Jenny, home-educator).**

Moreover, Rhian explained:

> [T]here isn't a home-education community because we are all here for very different reasons and take very different approaches… You know that causes some of the problems for home-educators…, we are all driven by the same desires, but we don't all do things in the same way… **(Rhian, home-educator).**

These findings evidence Stafford's (2012) view that home-educators are traditionally and organisationally a weak group. They are ideologically and geographically disparate and do not have a clearly defined interest group or organisation to adequately represent their views (p.367). Arguably, social networking afforded passionate individuals who were in opposition to the proposals to mobilise others in a way that Pattison (2012) suggests would not have been possible with any other form of communication.

As I discuss in the following sections, a significant element of the feature of social networking during the Badman campaign was centred around challenging a perceived wider cultural misrecognition through attempts to 'generate' and counteract negative media coverage. This was done through writing to newspapers, such as *The Guardian*, and in doing so generate more positive news coverage at a time when some home-educators and their families felt that the *Badman Review* had placed them under undue scrutiny.

> We worked very hard in 2009 and in 2010 to get some decent press coverage, mainly to counteract the government who kept saying that we were all doing it for child abuse purposes and forced marriage and all that kind of thing… **(Esther, home-educator).**

6.4   Social Networking and The Badman Campaign

In response to the *Badman Review*, a national campaign levied against the proposed changes to the registration of home-education was launched in 2010. Some of the key events in the campaign included the following (see Table 6.4 below):

Table 6.4. Key events in the Badman Campaign

July 2009-

- Post card campaign to MPs;

August 2009-

- Videos posted to YouTube e.g. *'The Badman Song'[30];*

September 2009-

- '*Not Back to School Picnics'* organised nationwide

October 2009-

- Over 400 home-educators visited their MPs at a Westminster mass lobby *(see Fig 6.4 below);*
- Education Otherwise Parliamentary event;

December 2009-

- 120+ petitions were presented to over 70 MPs rejecting the recommendations of the *Badman Review*;

January 2010-

- Letter issued to the Guardian calling for withdrawal of the Bill with over 1,000 signatories;
- All Party Parliamentary Group on Home-education Open Meeting with Ministers;
- Education Otherwise postcard to all MPs prior to 2nd Reading;
- Education Otherwise publishes position statement (does not offer countenance nor suggests any amendments to the Bill);
- Public Bill Committee faces criticism of proposed changes to the law on home-education (*Children and Families Bill 2010*);
- Education Otherwise informs MPs that they would not offer support in implementing new measures;

April 2010-

- Outcome announced by Ed Balls [*Secretary of State for Education*] - clause on home-education dropped (linked to impeding general election).

-Source: Adapted from Pattison, 2012: pp.9-10 [*emphasis added*]

---

[30] To view *The Badman Song* (2009), please visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QjdcdG4mP4

Figure 6.4: Photograph of home-educator's 'March on Parliament', October 2009

-Source: edyourself.org (2009)

This national campaign was facilitated by home-educators across England and neighbouring countries and included several local and national demonstrations such as: a national petition, a march on the Houses of Parliament, a national 'picnic' event with home-educating families, letters to news media companies i.e. the BBC, letters to local MPs, meetings with local council representatives, neighbourhood petitions and door-to-door canvassing in local communities. Some of the parents interviewed, recalled participating in these events:

> I organised the petition in this area. I got some of my neighbours to sign the petition. Some of them signed straight away, the others signed after I had had a conversation with them… **(Nicky, home-educator).**

> [D]uring that time there was an awful lot of sharing information… and also orchestrating people in all of their different geographical areas to go and visit their local MP…People who were maybe less confident and articulate in what they wanted to say to their local politician, but still wanted to make their views known, they gathered information and advice… this was useful in helping to get the word out and to make people more aware of political machinations… **(Elaine, OM).**

The use of online media technologies featured heavily across some groups as part of mobilising a wider mass of home-educators to engage in social action. Blogs, forums and other social media were used or created to share information with the aim of discussing and making visible the 'flaws' of the *Badman Review* and to express opposition to the proposed legislative changes to home-education in England. New Facebook and Yahoo! groups were also set up with the aims of supporting various strands of this campaign.

These online spaces were used to circulate petitions, to write letters to MPs, to discuss strategies, to organise local and national demonstrations and to provide support to those concerned or unsure of their legal rights. As one online moderator explains:

> [T]hey motivated people through the Yahoo! groups…the fact that people were talking and doing web pages blogs, they were able to get the information out there and say, 'this is the situation, even if you just do this or you just do that it all will help'... **(Holly, home-educator).**

In August 2009, the charity Education Otherwise issued a series of videos to their YouTube channel providing 'an introduction into the subject of home-education in England and Wales', which included a video titled 'School is Not Compulsory' (EO YouTube Channel 2009). Other YouTube videos, such as the 'Badman song' (a cover of Pink Floyd's 'Brick in the Wall') showed home-educators and young people singing '*we don't need your education…Hey Badman! Leave home ed alone!*' were also created and circulated across blogs, Yahoo! and the 'Action for Home-education UK' group website (Action for Home-education UK 2016).

With the aim of challenging negative media coverage, some parents wrote letters to newspapers, and flooded the comments sections of news articles online to 'speak' and quash the perception that home-educated children might be 'hidden' or more at risk than children and young people who attend school (see Fig 6.4 above). For example, an open letter sent to *The Guardian* called for the withdrawal of Section 26 (Schedule 1 and 27) of the *Children, Schools and Families Bill.* The letter asserts that it represented "an unacceptable imposition of state control over families" (The Guardian 2010). Lorraine described this time as a process of challenging media sensationalism, making the voices of home-educators heard:

> …[T]here were some reports during the time of Badman, saying that we were quite aggressive, because we campaigned very fiercely. We fought really hard to gain some decent press coverage… I think home-educators did a very good job at pointing out the sensationalism and making our voices heard… **(Lorraine, OM).**

Interestingly Lorraine's comments above allude to what Pattison (2015) suggested was the 'genuine struggle of talking across the philosophical divides of education' (p.4).

6.5   Outcomes: the acquisition of political representation

Most participants described the Badman campaign as successful in helping to showcase the needs, interests and rights of home-educators to those who otherwise would not have been interested in their concerns. As examples, Lorraine and Holly explain:

> Many members of Parliament who hadn't ever needed to think about it did some very intelligent thinking about it…[T]here was some great support for us in the Lords as well and in the Commons…we certainly awakened people to the idea that home-education existed, we also showed what kind of education it was… **(Lorraine, OM).**

> Our local MP, he was at that the march. When he first started, he was definitely anti-home-education, because you know he is conservative and I think his wife is a teacher…but to

give him his dues, I think he was very good and actually backed us in the end… They made the labour government realise that this was a massive group… **(Holly, home-educator).**

It could be inferred that the role of social networking facilitated home-educators winning the support of several MPs. The acquisition of this support was pivotal to the development of the *All-Party Committee for Home-education*. As Stafford (2012) explains "in opposing the reviews' proposals, home-educators were assisted by three politicians, Mark Field MP, Lord Lucas and Graham Stuart MP" (p.320) who became the focus of parliamentary opposition to the review and the associated clauses in the Children, Schools and Families Bill. Arguably, new technologies made home-education more visible to policy makers, but in turn contributed to perhaps one of the more positive outcomes of the *Badman Review* which was the establishment of the All-Party Progress Committee - who granted home-educators political representation. Without this, political opposition to the Bill might not have been fully realised or mustered (Pattison 2012).

Several home-educators felt that the broader purpose of the campaign was not just to challenge the government's idea of home-education, but to show what home-education was really like by challenging deep-seated misconceptions and stereotypes. A use of online networks helped to co-ordinate a clearer and more effective message to politicians and the wider non-home-educating population.

> [I]t mobilises everybody to write to members of Parliament, to sign petitions…so the Government are aware that actually this is a big group of people, it's not just a small group of crazy people… **(Harriet, home-educator).**

The final outcome came in April 2010 when Ed Balls [former Secretary of State for Education] announced that the legislative proposals on home-education would be dropped, and is likely to be linked to the infeasibility of passing such changes prior to the imminent dissolution of parliament (Pattison 2012). Nicolson (2016) asserted that after the election of the Coalition Government in 2010, two Badman proposals continued to circulate within the Civil Service - though failed to materialise. One of these included extending the duration of how long children remained on the school roll by an additional 20 days; following the submission of a written parental request to home-educate (Nicolson 2016). However, it could be inferred that the lengthening process and political opposition bolstered by the establishment of the All-Party Progress Committee, might have helped to delay this decision.

The findings therefore show that new technologies allowed home-educators to coordinate themselves on a scale that otherwise would not have been as possible, the effects of which may have challenged some of the negative perceptions of home-education.

Through the orchestration of the Badman campaign, advocates made challenged the dominant position of schools, by making home-educating visible in the public and political eye (Pattison 2012). Evidently, several parents felt liberated because of their participation. The findings substantiate Lees' (2013) inclination that the Badman era rendered home-education visible in the public arena. Thus, the one hand, the acquisition of political representation could be viewed as a symbolic moment that steered the attention of policy makers away from 'populism' and towards the recognition of education as multi-modal. Crucially, the counter-narrative communicated in the Badman campaign is likely to have generated an awareness of home-education families in a way that perhaps was not as visible prior to the availability of new technologies. However, the extent to which this portion of home-educators was a coherent body of representation of many home-educators is problematic when considering some of the practices and consequences that occurred in the online landscape during and as a result of the Badman campaign. Exploring this and its significance for the nature of home-education knowledge 'online' is the task of the remaining sections of this chapter.

6.6   Creating new divisions…

The following sections describe some of the communicative practices (that took place among online groups) and *unintended* but perhaps *anticipated* consequences (de Zwart 2015) in the landscape during the Badman campaign. Specifically, I explore the ways in which these practices signified a critical moment that in turn altered the boundary relations between different interest groups in home-education. I then consider how the mechanisms of organisation afforded to online moderators and other key members, through the appropriation of new technologies, could serve to hinder the social enterprise of home-education described in *Chapter five*. This encompasses thinking about how the role of new technologies might contradict the very efforts of advocates and interest groups in their efforts to challenge reactive policy making and wider perceptions of home-education.

6.6.1   Extinguishing flame wars: power and control

As I discussed in earlier sections of this chapter, the Badman campaign signalled a heightened sense of fear and realised vulnerability amongst some home-educators. Interestingly, this anxiety was visible encounters between central and peripheral individuals in the landscape (Wenger 1998). At the time, several online moderators described situations (or knowledge of them) when some of the online groups were 'infiltrated' by LA officials or other 'bogus' home-educators with the view to 'creaming' off information about home-educators who were not known to their LA. More specifically, Kim explained:

[W]e have had lots of issues where there have been local authorities trying to sneak onto the lists. That has happened lots of times over the years. Maybe they were trying to find home-educators in their area… **(Kim, home-educator).**

The anxiety associated with the risk of fake home-educators gaining access to groups with the view to causing trouble was compounded by the anonymity afforded through the technologies of Yahoo! and Facebook itself. The perceived political vulnerability of home-educators alongside the importance of online spaces for orchestrating led to the implementation of membership vetting and codes of conduct for existing and potential members in the landscape of home-educators who participated in these online spaces. As Elaine alludes:

> …If there is something like a political campaign or a consultation going on people's feelings run really high and we need to know that…we are discussing things in our own community without that outside listening to us. Particularly if we are talking about our strategy, or if we are talking about meetings coming up with local MPs… **(Elaine, OM).**

Encounters such as these, or knowledge of them taking place in neighbouring online groups, exacerbated a sense of weariness and suspicion which in most cases underpinned the necessity of current membership vetting procedures and regulations and guidelines practised by the online moderators maintaining boundaries online (Wenger 2010). Part of this role encompassed *brokering* (Wenger 1998) between different groups in order to identify membership requests from illegitimate home-educators. This involved online moderators circulating information amongst one another in order to identify persons who were not perceived to have a 'genuine' interest in seeking advice and support from home-educators. As a few online moderators illustrated:

> There was somebody who was moving around different groups and joining in order to create waves…people were very nervous about what that person's motivations were… that person's membership was refused on other forums because it wasn't perceived that it was for genuine personal need for friendship or information… **(Lorraine, OM).**

Interestingly, some parents felt that despite the success of their campaign, the 'memory of Badman' was evidence that home-education continues to risk being an 'easy target' for politicians and the government to blame and ostracise for its own failures. The effects of this resulted in a continued sense of fear and the feeling that home-educators need to constantly be 'on guard'. As an online moderator and two home-educators illustrated:

> We are under increasing surveillance. The Government doesn't like free thinkers, do they? They like to indoctrinate people… **(Iona, home-educator).**

Consequently, several online moderators tightened access to their group's respective Yahoo! and/or Facebook page. Vicky and Sam showed:

> [T]he home-education forums are membership only because there is a bit of paranoia about anti-home-education people joining, or spying…I think it gives more control… if you

get difficult people you can ban them…and there are difficult people in home-education… **(Vicky, home-educator).**

So, people are a bit wary and there is, on a lot of these forums now, there is the please identify yourself as a home-educator and introduce yourself … There is a really sort of wariness about making sure people are actually genuine... **(Sam, OM).**

This underpinned some of the requirements for current membership approval process that are carried out by some of the moderators of different groups within the online landscape:

It is a Yahoo! group and in order to join it you have to tell the group owner i.e. me why you want to join the group…. So if you want to join it you have to write 200 words or less…based on that I can decide who to allow in…I don't want members to feel that they are being watched…because we do get stigmatised sometimes especially in the press… **(Claudia, OM).**

Moreover, as Elaine demonstrates:

If you are invited to join a Yahoo! group, you will be checked out. All of the home-education groups work that way. We check as thoroughly as we can... We will ask other people who are in that person's geographical location, do you know this person? Do you have any experience of who this person is?... [A]re they who they are claiming to be? **Elaine (OM).**

These findings suggest that in some respects the Badman era initiated the establishment of strengthened measures to protect the mutual enterprise of home-educating communities'. The effects of which, elevated the power of online moderators. The emergence of leaders in communities is somewhat inevitable as the landscape evolves (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015:

In many communities of practice decisions need to be taken, conditions need to be put in place, strategic conversations need to be had…Whether you call them leaders, coordinators, or stewards, someone needs to do it - and it is as well to recognise them for the role they play... (Wenger-Trayner 2015, p.15).

The effects of leadership in this research pointed to the strengthening of classification between legitimate home-educators and illegitimate non-home-educators. However, the basis upon which this criterion was established and maintained is a function only available to moderators in these online spaces. This, therefore suggests that implicit power relations might exist between different home-educators that have been enabled through the appropriation of new technologies.

Evidently, for some parents in the landscape, participating in online groups facilitated sense of *imagination* with the shared enterprise of home-education (Wenger 1998). It created a sense of affinity to perceived collective of 'united' parents and other advocates. However, the remarks made by several other participants interviewed, pointed to a much more divided reality. In particular, it was time when the counter-perspectives and experiences of some home-educators were supressed and/or ignored. For example, one online moderator explained:

…I was actually kicked off a list during the Badman situation because…I was pointing out that actually with special needs kids, families do still have to talk to the local authorities. For instance, if they are statemented…those of us that took a more moderate line were either asked to leave, or felt that they had no choice to leave because…they wanted a more extreme line against Graham Badman's proposals…(**Becky, OM**).

The vetting of infiltrators was not confined to the interactions between peripheral and central members of the home-educating community. It also spilled over into the interactions between home-educators themselves. The struggle for coherence, exacerbated the philosophical divisions between different home-educators. For example, Elaine explained that a 'disgruntled minority' used online groups to silence or exclude individuals with oppositional views:

In these groups certain people can get ostracised and it happens on national groups, and it happens on local groups and maybe we don't talk about it and maybe we should. I think that home-education, because it is at odds with mainstream society and because we tend to encounter quite a lot of hostility, negativity. I think we can become quite defensive as a community… I think sometimes that defensiveness spills over into our interactions with other home-educators….**(Elaine, OM).**

At the time of the *Badman Review*, unconfirmed reports suggested that Facebook was used by some alleged home-educators to threaten Graham Badman and his family. For instance, in Becky's earlier comments she mentioned:

…[O]r it was the police infiltrating because there had been threats made against Graham Badman, and his family…**(Becky, OM).**

The reported allegations made against Graham Badman and his family had an immediate detrimental effect on efforts of advocates to expose the weak evidence base that underpinned the Review itself. In an email correspondence between a home-educator and a representative of the Department for Schools, Children and Families (circulated on the *Action for Home-education UK* website), the alleged harassments made against Badman on Facebook directly resulted in the decision to withhold freedom of information requests on the grounds of safety and the public interest. An excerpt from the exchange reads:

The department is aware that attempts are being made on the internet to vilify and harass the author of the review. It is the department's view that, whilst dealing with each request on its merits, this situation will have to be taken into account in dealing with any relevant FOI requests. We therefore consider that section 38 is engaged in respect of all the submissions you have requested… (Source: AHED.org 2009).

Home-educators who advocated registration and/or more formal approaches towards the practice of home-education were also and continued to be 'quietened' by being banned, asked to leave and/or blacklisted by the online moderators of some Yahoo! and Facebook groups. This is captured in the remarks of several interviewees:

I've been accused of being a troll on a list once... a troll is somebody that goes on lists to deliberately cause a lot of problems...And some home-educators have this idea that you don't have to teach children anything and that they would just learn automatically...I said well actually that's not true, especially if you have children with any sort of special needs - those children may need extra help and intervention in order to be able to write or to do anything...**(Becky, OM).**

Moreover, Lorraine remarks:

...[W]e have been blacklisted by some people. There are a couple of people who have got a real downer on any structure in home-education. They are kind of pathological about it and they have told people not to listen to me when I have explained that we have a routine...and in home-education that you don't have to do it completely unstructured...they stopped being friendly to us...you're exchanging loads of emails and then all of a sudden it stops...So that is one of the reasons why we're moving away from a certain group of people really...**(Lorraine, OM).**

Of the participants who illustrated some of the confrontations, challenges and issues that they had encountered while participating in some local groups online, several online moderators and home-educators described that how, as a consequence of challenging the established modes of conduct, rules and regulations and/or the enterprise (which encompassed various aspects of the ethos, values and sentiments held by members of the online group), felt ostracised and unfairly treated by moderators and other key groups members. For example, home-educator Grace, describes 'standing up' to an online moderator who tried to ban her friend Liz (who did not participate in this study), who was new to home-education, from their local Yahoo! group. Grace's friend, Liz, who had recently begun home-educating due to her daughter's serious physical health condition, had decided to use an anonymous profile picture and name to ensure the privacy of her family. Liz, who was at the hospital with her daughter at the time, contacted Grace in distress. The online moderator of Grace's local group had posted a message on the group Facebook page in addition to messaging all the group members declaring that that Liz was an 'imposter' and should she be reported and banned from participating in the group. Grace explained that the online moderator was under the impression that Liz's profile was not authentic which called into question the legitimacy of her claim to be a 'genuine' home-educator. As Grace illustrates:

...[Liz] doesn't use her real name on Facebook or on any of the other groups...she also doesn't or post any pictures of the children... She used a picture of a flower instead and because of an [online moderator] thought that [Liz] was an imposter...She had said "this lady is an impostor" to all of her friends on her Facebook page and that she was going report Liz to Facebook and get her banned... **(Grace, home-educator).**

Grace, explained to the online moderator that she knew Liz in person and that she was in fact a genuine home-educator and that she would be happy to introduce the moderator and members to Liz offline. Grace also asked the moderator to apologise for the profanities contained in the email

that she had sent to Liz and other members of the group. Grace explained to the moderator, that for Liz, the Facebook group was 'crucial lifeline of support' as a home-educator as her daughter's health condition often prevented Liz from regularly socialising with home-educator's offline. In response, the online moderator called into question the validity of Grace's counter claims, exclaiming that Grace was lying and that she could also not be trusted. In the days that followed, it transpired that the online moderator utilised her membership to other online groups in order to further 'damage' the legitimacy and thus competence of Grace's reputation as a home-educator, by sending messages to neighbouring groups and through the creation of a 'witch hunt group' with another online moderator. Grace explained:

> …The only thing I have ever done was that I stood up for my friend…I just said 'you know you're wrong, you need to stop'… When I made her look like a fool, she went off to another group and started slagging me off there. It was a few days later that somebody said to me "are you okay?" Apparently this online moderator had encouraged this other person to set up a witch-hunt group for me... **(Grace, home-educator).**

Consequently, Elaine explains that in some home-education circles, the opinions of certain home-educators are silenced, and do not get 'heard' through their subsequent exclusion to the periphery:

> Simon can't say a word on any of the Yahoo! groups, because his voice is a very interesting voice, but a very minority voice. In the end he is not generally respected or listened to... There should be a diverse range of opinions allowed and I think it can be, in some home ed circles, that a certain kind of opinion is not allowed…. **(Elaine, OM).**

Moreover, one of the survey respondents explained:

> …I have been stunned to see how divisive the local Christian group is. You have to agree that the moderator of the list is your leader and can make any decision she wishes without consulting anyone. There was recently a new home school mother who had post-natal depression and needed support to continue home-schooling her older child, but the moderator interviewed her and then would not allow this mother to join…This mother was devastated **(Respondent 201).**

These findings highlight that to ensure that the values and beliefs of some of the groups were protected from critical or oppositional viewpoints of those who did fully appreciate or understand the issues that home-educators face or the difficulties associated with undertaking it. These encounters cast the conduct, interests, experiences, values and beliefs of some groups members in direct opposition to the established repertoires and perceived interests, values and beliefs of the online group.

Furthermore, across some of the larger online groups, several online moderators highlighted the need to regulate both the flow and direction of information shared between members of the group they moderated. On occasions this included requesting that certain members circulate no more than two emails to the group per day for example. It also included issuing 'group reminders' to the

membership reiterating the importance of 'keeping on topic'. Crucially, in large established online groups, a large volume of email traffic consisting of 'general mundane chit chat' was perceived by some moderators as a nuisance to more competent members of the community who were usually busy undertaking activities offline. As Nadine, an online moderator, explained that the busiest home-educators were usually the most experienced and therefore were likely to have the most to 'offer' the group. Subsequently, *knowledge stewarding* (Wenger 1998) was important to ensure that *competent* members did not leave the group.

> [T]he moderator's role is to keep on topic…if you have too much traffic that is irrelevant then the people who drop out…the busiest people and are the ones who've got the most to offer because they're the people who are maybe towards the end of their home-education career and they have all the experience… **(Nadine, home-educator).**

Crucially, rather than negotiate meaning, the mechanisms of control afforded through new technologies can strengthen the control that online moderators have in controlling the boundaries between what can and cannot be discussed online. Bernstein's (1971) notion of 'frame' for describing the strength of boundary between what can and cannot be transmitted in the interactional relationships between members of groups is relevant in this regard. In other words, 'frame' describes the extent to which moderators control the 'selection, organisation, pacing and timing of knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship (Bernstein 1971, p. 7). In this way, the concept of framing surfaces the extent to which power relations exist behind the relationships of 'transmitters and acquirers' in the online landscape. Moreover, it also highlights the extent to which certain kinds of information are prioritised over others and the extent to which other members can decide what, when and how knowledge is shared within online groups (Cause 2010).

6.7   Unintended consequences

The following sections describe the ways in which the boundary practices among some home-education groups altered aspects of the online landscape. This includes the unintended consequences for making of, and implications for, knowledge online. More specifically this analysis aims to show that as home-educators use and adopt new technologies they shape knowledge, and in doing so create other technologies 'of home-education'. The message systems and content produced in these relations pose unique and paradoxical challenges for the goals, values and wider recognition that some parents, interests groups and stakeholders in home-education are striving toward.

6.7.1 Boundary strengthening: bullying and breakaways

Arguably, the Badman campaign signalled a critical moment in the online groups where, because of boundary strengthening, some home-education groups broke away from one another. As Grace illustrates:

> [T]hey couldn't agree…so what actually happened was that part of that group broke away and became a political arm of the campaign against the government and they did a very good job…and you'll find there are a lot of those people are the ones that are like "avoid all authority! They are all liars!" **(Grace home-educator).**

Grace's comments above refer to the disagreements between trustees for Education Otherwise (EO) who felt that they should largely focus on providing information rather than 'taking sides', with the group who later became Action for Home-education (AHed). In contrast, AHed were keen to construct a visible and clear opposition. Leaving certain groups due to being silenced and/or as a result of having your experiences and views belittled by some group members was not confined to discussions of LA involvement. As Becky explained:

> There are some sectors of home-education who are so anti-school that if you do have one child who is at school you are part of the outgroup…they think that you are a not a proper home-educator if you still use the school system…but some parents take their child out of school for a year or two and then when they are ready, send them back…those people are not accepted into some home-education communities. Interestingly…when Michael Gove announced all of the free schools and things like that, a group of home-educators put the word out that they were thinking of setting something up and they thought that they might just have a few families come and sit in the sitting room that they had to hire a hall because 50 people showed up and some email lists then banned any talk about schools and any talk about free schools or anything on those lines … [T]they wanted to set up an alternative school and any discussion about that was immediately taken off the home-education list and they set up their own email list…**(Becky, OM).**

Interestingly, in her analysis 'Home-education as Heterotopia', Pattison (2015) notes how the *Badman Review* exacerbated the philosophical divisions between 'autonomous' home-educators and 'advocates of education as schooling', creating a communicative impasse, as reported to the Select Committee (Pattison 2015, p.4). Evidently, the findings of this research highlighted that when communicative action between home-educators now was translated to the internet, this impasse might have extended to the ways in which home-educators communicated with other more 'school orientated' home-educators. While 'officially' the debate on alternative education and its relation to mainstream conventions' was lost, much of this communicative action and talk happened between home-educators themselves.

Moreover, these findings strongly echo Steven's (2001) observations on the tensions between home-educators who adopt more structured versus autonomous approaches. Evidently, however, these divisions are now also voiced, and thus are visible to parents online. Nadine further described

how one domain of practice failed to re-negotiate and incorporate the experiences of a competing voice. Instead this member left because she could no longer identify with the group (Wenger 2010):

> [A] very close friend of mine who used to work at [X] University as a lecturer on a PGCE course had commented "based on my role, this is what the admissions at this university department would have done if someone had non-standard qualifications…" Another member who perhaps had a different view of this clearly went and googled my friend…[T]hey obviously thought "well she's disagreeing with me, who is she to disagree with me!...[T]his person then posted: "I think your experience of teaching a PGCE at a third-rate university is quite different from my husband's experience of teaching at the top ranking university"…This really upset my friend… she had stayed on the list to share her experiences after her kids had grown up…So she thought: "I am only here to try and help somebody and they are just belittling me so I'm off!"…**(Nadine, home-educator).**

Subsequently, Vicky described why she chose to leave a national Yahoo! group during the Badman campaign:

> There was one where I came off on there because I was fed up of all the arguments. It was full of really crazy libertarians…. I quite like the political debates, but then you get to a point where everyone starts shouting and getting angry with each other. There was quite a lot of abuse there, people being abusive. I just don't want to read that… **(Vicky, home-educator).**

Arguably the feature of new technologies in the immediate time after Badman resulted in polarised perspectives between the virtual community and home-educators without a presence in the 'online world'. Paradoxically, in an effort to cross the boundaries between a generalised culture of misrecognition (Fraser 1999) some home-educators silenced the perspectives it stood to campaign for.

Within the wider education landscape, the recognition of an alternative to schooling is scarce. Legitimacy therefore, is more likely to be won by the cultural agents with the most power to shape public discourse. During the Badman campaign, home-educators were engaged in a symbolic struggle over the representation of 'home-education' itself. Bourdieu (1989) might liken the 'objective' side of this struggle, collections of parents were striving for coherence, for size strength and 'visibility' in the political arena. Yet, the coexisting subjective side of this struggle saw individuals struggling within and amongst themselves, through the efforts to transform smaller categories of difference to similarity. In this respect, the role of new technologies in the Badman campaign enabled what one could view as a political struggle within and outside of home-education. One sought to fight against the government and in doing so unconsciously imposed a "legitimate principle of vision and division" (Bourdieu 1989, p.21).

6.7.2 The lasting memory of Badman:

The kinds of discussion and information shared across several online Yahoo! and Facebook groups were described by some participants as polarised. For example, advice offered about LA involvement, a few home-educators explained:

> You can have the best intentions and want to do it for all the right reasons…When people bring it up, and say "oh my gosh, we have to have this visit!" …I just say "well, we had one and it was fine". Then there are other people who say "oh don't let them in your house, don't let them see the children!" **(Claudia, OM).**

> [T]here is quite a lot of scaremongering. One bad experience spreads throughout the whole community, whereas a number of good experiences just can't counter the bad experiences… **(Ryan, home-educator).**

Interestingly, some of the parents that I interviewed felt that the extreme accounts of how terrible local authorities were did not adequately reflect their experiences, or the experiences of other home-educating families they knew:

> I mean some people seem to think of the LA as the Gestapo…. they fear that they are going to have a dawn raid by social services…a lot of it is a fear of outsiders really…. **(Gemma, home-educator).**

> The families who don't connect with the online communities tend to be the families who have home visits and who have built up personal relationships with local authorities…. [T]hey don't have that hard line stance…[T]he online home-educating community….is only a small proportion of home-educators… **(Elaine, OM).**

This was followed by the perception that some parents refuse or want to ignore the possibility that home-education is not 100% perfect. As examples, Nadine and Elaine both observed instances of neglect by parents who had indicated they were home-educating. They asserted that most home-educators active online did not consider these parents as 'authentic' home-educators, and these parents weren't representative of the home-education community. This highlights the tension between multiple groups seeking representation in the landscape of home-education practice. The retort to this is typically that, in these instances, the practices of such parents did not constitute home-education, nor were they home-educators. The difficulties with such reasoning are that the absence of any guidance and clarity around what is and isn't home-education alongside the numbers and kinds of families who home-educate means casts the views of some parents against others.

> As a home-educator I have been allowed into home visits…. So I have seen the families that home-educators don't generally want to talk about, the ones…who have some very difficult social circumstances going on, like drug and alcohol abuse… **(Elaine, OM).**

Moreover, the parents that I interviewed who were known and in contact with their LA reported having a good relationship with their education welfare officer. For example:

> My experience with the LA in [*Wales*] has been excellent. They have been very open minded, totally got where I am coming from. They are happy with what we are doing the kids and they have been great… **(Cerian, home-educator).**

Out of the 237 respondents survey, 54% (128) indicated that they were known to the LA, while 44% (109) were not. Of the 128 respondents who had contact with their LA, 6% (8) described their relationship with their LA as bad, and only 2% (2) described it as 'very bad'. While just over half (52%) of participants described it as either 'good' (39) or 'very good' (27) and the remaining 42% described the relationship as 'neither good nor bad' (41%). Overall this suggests that the home-educators who have known the LA, the majority have good relationships, while poor relations are the experience of the minority as opposed to the majority. This is not to invalidate the negative experiences and issues that some home-educators have encountered when dealing with their LA, however the trend towards good relationships shows that the prevalence of negative experiences and encounters with the Local Authorities are not representative.

Parents who were new to home-education, such as Elsa, expressed that she wouldn't mind having a formal registration in place, but would not express this view online:

> ... I don't have a problem because I've got nothing to hide, but I would probably be shot in flames by those home-education groups if I mentioned that there should be something in place... **(Elsa, home-educator).**

Furthermore, several parents reported feeling alienated and excluded from discussions on exams and particular styles of home-education. For example, on survey respondent remarked:

> I am a member of (*group name*) which aims to give advice about exams and beyond to home-educating families… much of the advice on the (*group name*) list is highly inaccurate. Folk seem to think they will be snapped up at Oxbridge with few formal qualifications. There are a number of us on that Yahoo! list who are married to academics but we are unable to explain the reality of the competition for fear of an intense mob-attack. One of the wives did attempt to put some posts up a while ago, and a whole bunch of people on that list verbally attacked her and said she was just trying to scare them… **(Respondent 12).**

Moreover, a second survey respondent remarked:

> One concern I have is that there is such a strong anti-achievement culture throughout home-education networks…The few families who really strive to educate their children can experience low-level bullying and covert exclusion socially… (**Respondent 43).**

These findings show that boundary strengthening and the self-exclusion that follows means that 'knowledge' produced by groups online is not neutral, and as an unintended consequence reflect the values and interests of a small number of groups rather than the majority of members. It could be inferred that these findings highlight the ways in which the home-education ideologies of some

of the dominant groups get transferred and relayed to new members online. As one parent remarked:

> When somebody joins an online group, and they are in crisis etc., they have this child, they are not quite sure what to do with them, almost always they become quite radicalised quite quickly…the most vociferous, the most vocal, the most hard line stance will always come in immediately as the advice offered to a new family…It is quite a closed community in some ways… because there is always this unspoken fear that at any point the government could…outlaw home-education… there is always this pressure …to continue to prop up this facade that everything is hunky-dory in the world of home-education. But, we are just people like anybody else… **(Elaine, OM).**

In this way, is could be suggested that they mirror the positions of power that were reproduced and transferred across different online and offline social learning systems. In this case, the mechanisms of *production* and *reproduction* are shifted and altered across different points and mechanisms used in the landscape (across both online and offline spaces) (Bernstein 1975b). In other words, where perhaps the *domains of practice* in home-education were more *vertically* arranged offline, they might have become *horizontal* online (see *Chapter Four* for a recap). Consequently, this means that the *horizontal* structures in online groups will be mirrored in the offline communities initiated and sustained in future. Thus, the extent to which some CoPs home-education 'neighbourhood groups' are inherently loose and non-hierarchically structured as Safran (2008) found, might have changed with new technologies.

6.8   Implications for shared enterprise of home-education

For practice to remain innovative, Wenger (1998) argued the *joint enterprise* of a CoP should be negotiated, and thus changed if needed. In other words, all members should have agency in contributing towards the construction of the community's *enterprise*. Problematically, the strengthening of, and subsequent exclusion of *peripheries* at the point of *boundary* could unintentionally limit the future success of groups in the LoP.

The notion of groups in home-education existing in isolation and/or self-selecting cliques was articulated by several of the parents surveyed and interviewed:

> I guess one of our biggest disappointments with home-educating is that bullying is just as rife in home-schooling as we hear it is in schools. It's very cliquey; I can see that some new families get taken into the fold, while others are left on the periphery indefinitely… **(Respondent, 201).**

> I think we just need to be aware and not to live in our own restricted bubble that says all home-educators are great, home-education is the way forward for everybody… **(Elaine, OM).**

Consequently, Becky explained that some of the home-educators who participated in online groups were not always aware of the 'negative side' of home-education practice:

> [T]he home-educators on online groups, they don't see the kinds of home-education that the LA sees…You know, parents who deregister their children because they are truanting… mums that are on tranquil all day and are who are too drunk in the mornings to get their kids to school…. if they have never met somebody like they won't understand where the LA is coming from… **(Becky, OM)**

The self-exclusionary tactics described in the remarks above, signal what Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2015) identify as 'settling in of group', whereby voices are silenced and differences are not easily discussable. If this is happening widely, this might reduce the bonding capital between factions of the home-education population (Putnam 2000). Notably, solidarity and reciprocity and collective voice are essential tools for the formation of the strong coalition and mutual benefit of homogenous and marginalised groups. For example, Fukuyama (1996) warns against the wider societal challenges of groups that, intentionally or unintentionally, promote practices based on distrust.

Paradoxically, the findings in this study suggest that home-educators who participate in some domains of practice are likely to share norms and beliefs with one another. At the same time, the bridges between them obscure the quest for the equal representation of all those connected, or not, to the LoP. Several parents alluded to the potential challenge of this for new and existing members who participate in online spaces:

> If you were to only spend your life on the internet among the home-education communities, you would see your LA as the enemy…don't touch them with the bargepole sort of thing… **(Elaine, OM)**

> My only thing is that I think people know they need to have a middle ground…for those parents who are coming in and considering taking their children out of school to hear nothing but 'my child learned to read and write by playing computer games'…. seems to be quite an extreme…. you can have a bit of structure and still have happy children and enjoy home-educating…parents need to know all of their options… **(Lorraine, OM).**

The discussion set out in Section 6.7 thus far has illustrated the polarisation of power relations, knowledge shaping that can happen because of boundary strengthening online. The effects of a self-selecting 'group think' poses a challenge for the *innovativeness* of the landscape of home-education practice. Pertinently, Wegner (1998) argued that for Communities of Practice to remain innovative, their '*joint enterprise*' needs to be mutually negotiated. Crucially, *reification* at the point of *boundary* should reflect a democratic process of *engagement* between members. Instead, the power and control afforded to online moderators (visible in boundary strengthening), might mean that the local enterprise of some communities and networks mirror the values and interest of those

with the greatest stake in the landscape of home-education practice. The memory of Badman (Section 6.7.2) shows that the divisions and insularity, evident in the participation use of Yahoo! and Facebook groups, might paradoxically thwart the efforts of new and existing communities and networks formed in the landscape.

6.9 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has described how online networks featured in the orchestration of a national campaign in opposition to the proposed legislative changes to home-education following the recommendations made in the *Badman Review* (2009). The mass social networking and subsequent sharing of information was fundamental to a campaign that bolstered the voices of a homogeneous, albeit a relatively small, collection of home-educators. However, amidst the challenges of crossing philosophical divides, some groups in home-education unintentionally divided themselves. On the one hand, home-educators acquired a sense of perceived unity through the participation in online and offline groups dedicated to support the campaign. Due to their heterogeneous ideologies and disparate geography, home-educators constitute a population with weak social ties. Crucially, social networking facilitated the political mobilisation of a highly co-ordinated group of advocates and campaigners on a scale that previous forms of communication would not have allowed. While it is difficult to ascertain if these efforts directly affected the outcomes of the campaign, the social action of these individuals helped to 'win over' the sympathies of a handful of politicians. The creation of the All-Party Parliamentary Group was a small, albeit visible political opposition that continues to function today. However, set against this perceived unity, divisions were unintentionally exacerbated. This was evident in the interactions between home-educators and the boundary strengthening that took place online. Consequently, the role of online networks paradoxically served to simultaneously unite and divide a community of communities. That is the values of freedom, together with the desire to challenge stereotypes, to recognise diversity and to achieve acceptance, was seemingly at odds with the effects of new technologies in the landscape of home-education practice. This chapter has demonstrated that, rather than achieving those ends, new technologies facilitated the reproduction of the subordinate status that home-education advocates and campaigners sought to challenge and/or to disrupt. In this way, I showed how that the insularity between *boundaries* in the landscape of practice might serve to thwart the *innovativeness* (Wenger 1998) of practice. The acquisition of new technologies therefore plays a mixed role for the kinds of communities and networks that exist in home-education.

Chapter 7 : Learning to become a home-educator

7.1   Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which participation in a landscape of online networks and offline communities feature in a journey of learning that prompts families to cross a 'gateway' into home-education (Lees 2013). Drawing primarily on parental interview accounts, I consider how the home-education families sampled arrived at the decision to home-educate and how the role of new technologies and communities have changed where and when this transition takes place. More specifically, drawing on Bourdieu's (1969) theory of capitals, I point out the informational and social deficits that would have traditionally prohibited some groups from being able to undertake this educational alternative. Using concepts from the CoP model and LoP framework (Wenger 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015), I also explain how the knowledge acquired from encountering like-minded home-educators is pivotal for cultivating a sense of parental commitment and identification with the shared enterprise of home-education outlined in *Chapter five*. In some ways, I suggest that this points towards the democratisation of home-education. It is shown that the proliferation and use of online networks have helped to generate a positive awareness of an alternative for parents and families who otherwise might not have discovered home-education. With reference to *Chapter six*, however, I point towards the underlying paradox of democratisation and the rhetoric of 'freedom' and 'openness' amidst boundary practices that weaken the bridges between some groups in the landscape of home-education practice.

7.2   The reasons for seeking an alternative

In *Chapter five*, it was suggested that the home-educators in this research shared an overarching *enterprise* in their pursuit of home-education (Wenger 1998). This was evident in their desire to cultivate 'happy', 'confident' and 'free' learners. Education was, therefore, part of a wider project rooted in social principles (Beck 2010). From their perspective, the academic and social environment in schools could not or had already failed to cater to these goals. At the same time, however, I also highlighted that the parents and children in different families have unique social, emotional and educational needs and interests. In other words, as a group, home-educators aim to reach the same destination but they have very different ideas about the best vehicle to transport them there. To follow on from this, my discussion now focuses on the parental dispositions and reasons given for the decision to home-educate in the survey responses and interviewee accounts.

When asked to rate the importance of factors influencing their family's decision to home-educate, the most important reasons in the 235 survey responses are listed in Table 7.2:

Table 7.2: Influential factors in the decision to home-educate

Factor	'Very important'& 'Important.'	Total Responses
The social environment within school/s e.g. violence, peer pressure	217	235
The quality of provision in state school/s e.g. teaching, class size, exams, etc.	207	235
Your child's individual experiences of school e.g. bullying, school phobia, SEN	140	230
Your child's social contact with friends	140	235
Your experience of school	80	233
The cost of home-educating	40	235
Your religious beliefs	40	234
Your qualifications	29	235
The views of family members and friends	16	235

The findings in Table 7.2 echo the point made at the start of this chapter - namely that the social context and child's individual experiences of school are the most important themes in the decision to home-educate. These findings imply that although 17% of the survey respondents identified religion as important to their lives, religious belief was not an important factor alone in the decision to home-educate. Instead, perspectives that positioned school as risking the social development of the child was more significant in the decision to home-educate. This supports my earlier assertion that while home-educators hold highly individualised experiences, attitudes and beliefs, their reasons for deciding to home-educate are more likely to be centred around the social and academic environment of schools, as well as the individual needs and experiences of children at school. These findings broadly support trends Beck (2010) observed on the social motivations among home-education families in the Netherlands.

7.2.1 Two kinds of decision-making

The journeys travelled for arriving at the gateway to alternative education highlighted unique differences in the relative positions of parents when they began home-education. This study found that for the 242 respondents surveyed and the 55 home-educators interviewed in this research, the decision to home-educate was typically underpinned by several multi-faceted and interlinked

factors. To make sense of these reasons within the unique familial disposition I use Ball's (2002) analogy of '*push*' and '*pull*' factors within what appeared to be two distinct forms of decision-making. Table 7.2.1 provides a summary of these themes (see Appx 11.4 for a comprehensive list)

Table 7.2.1: Pre-emptive and reactive decision-making

Pre-emptive decision-making	
Towards home-education: 'pull factors'	**Away from school: 'push factors'**
• *The role of education* • *Learner motivation and identity* • *Ideological beliefs: religious/political etc.* • *Childhood, family life and community*	• *Pedagogy in schools: class size, setting and streaming* • *Restrictive curriculum content* • *The authoritarian role of teachers and the lack of learner autonomy* • *Exams and teaching to test* • *The restrictive social environment in schools* • *The lack of personalised learning opportunities*
Reactive decision-making	
Away from school: 'pull factors'	**Towards home-education: 'push factors'**
• *Lack of provision for individual needs e.g. SEN* • *Poor educational and social development while child attended school* • *Bullying, mental health and emotional well being* • *Lack of school places*	• *To alleviate and rehabilitate the emotional wellbeing of the learner* • *To restore child's motivation towards learning* • *To compensate for the child's negative experiences of school* • *To mitigate the perceived risk of academic failure of learners*

Moreover, the interview accounts of how parents and their families had come to home-educate revealed two 'ideal' types of decision-making. I refer to these ideal types as 'pre-emptive' and 'reactive' types. Subsequently, it can be inferred that collectively the parents interviewed had become disillusioned and somewhat alienated from the current or future prospect of a 'schooled' education for their children. However, for pre-emptive types, entry into home-education was principally framed as a positive 'first choice'. In this way, there were several *pull factors* that drew these families towards the prospect of an alternative in education, while at the same time *pushing*

them away from the perceived relevance of a schooled education. On the other hand, for reactive types, entry into home-education had surfaced as the result of a series of negative encounters rooted in their child's experiences of schooled provision. There was therefore a greater sense this group had been *pushed* towards home-education and *away* from the continuation of school. This broad dichotomy is useful for surfacing the differing levels of social and cultural capital among families who, for multiple reasons, find themselves at the gateway of home-education (Lees 2013). In the remainder of this chapter, I show how participation in the landscape of home-education practice enabled a process whereby parents imagined themselves as belonging to an abstracted sense of community. I also illustrate how this process now takes place across both online and offline domains and, later, what this means for access to this educational alternative.

7.3 Pre-emptive decision-making

This research found that 20 of the 42 parents (interview group 3) interviewed had reached the decision to home-educate one or more of their children from the outset - meaning that when approaching the age of five years, their family's intended plan was to home-educate rather than send one or more of their children to school. In a few cases, some parents had implicitly reached this decision before their children were born. As Gemma, who had been home-educating for six years, explained:

> We knew about home-education generally because I was at university with one of those child geniuses who was home-educated. So, I had that sort of impression that if you have an incredibly gifted child, then this is a wonderful solution. I had previously wanted to be home-educated myself as a teenager, but I didn't know that you could do it until I met this boy… (**Gemma, home-educator).**

In this way, the possibility of home-education was framed as a seed of an idea, sometimes planted even before their children were born, which continued to grow and came to the fore when their children reached school age. During the pregnancy with her first child, Simone commented that the prospect of home-education was a tacit idea that matured as she read the works of writers such as Holt (see 1984). For instance:

> Okay so the first thing, when I was pregnant, I did a lot of reading and it sort of brewed for a while, I didn't really name it as home-education. I was just brewing things, and my feeling was that there would be no schooling… **(Simone, home-educator).**

7.3.1 Towards home-education: socialising with families

Across the account of parents who had reached the decision to home-educate early on was the crucial importance of previously meeting other home-education families offline (often simply by chance). The opportunity to meet and observe the behaviours of home-educated children and

young people further fed a sense of curiosity, fascination and amazement about the possibilities of what home-education could achieve. As Esther illustrated:

> [W]e met a family long before we had children and both of their children were home-educated, and it was just fascinating watching them…we stayed in contact with the family- I think they were 10 and 12 years old…when we first met the girls and I think the oldest will be 30 this year... **(Esther, home-educator).**

Moreover, while working as Christian mission aids, Derek and Naomi (who had been home - educating for nine years at the time of being interviewed) first encountered home-educating families in South Africa. Their later encounters with another home-educator and his teenage children while living in India, further strengthened their impression of home-education as a great and easy thing to do:

> When my wife and I were doing our marriage preparation, the guy who was helping us was home-educating himself. His children came in and asked some questions, so we started talking to him about home-education. So, that is when we first thought "oh that sounds like a great idea" … **(Derek, home-educator).**

> …[T]hey were really well-adjusted teenagers who spoke to people…It was absolutely wonderful to see… **(Niaomi, home-educator).**

For Kim meeting a home-educating family and seeing the 'success' of home-education first hand persuaded her to became a home-educator for the past 20 years. This, coupled with how well her children were learning at home as toddlers, meant that when her eldest son reached the age of four she felt that there was no need to change things by sending him to school:

> We stopped home-educating last year when my daughter went to college…I first heard about it before we had children when we met a family, I was very impressed with the children and how intelligent and sociable they were. My youngest had got to the age of four, he was learning really well at home, so I didn't feel the need to send him to school. With my other children, it was working well, so why would we have changed it **(Kim, online moderator).**

Similarly, having previously met a home-educating family and being 'exposed' to the ideas, Theresa showed:

> …[B]y the time I've been exposed to the idea… of us being together and continuing that family life that we'd already had…I was not particularly anti-school, I was just very pro-family learning… **(Theresa, home-educator).**

Interestingly, Theresa's comments arguably show Wenger's (1998) notion of *imagination* in engaging with the prospect of home-education (this concept that was outlined in *Chapter four*). In other words, Theresa was given an abstracted image of what home-education could offer her family in the future by positioning it within her experiences and knowledge of the family. It is through this

level of engagement that seeing herself as a home-educator was possible. Additionally, Gail described:

> [I] looked it up before my daughter was born... I had a friend who was also home-educating at the time and she introduced me to quite a few friends in the area…Seeing other families with older children I just thought the "yeah this is something that I could do" …it just follows on from what you do with a toddler... **(Gail, home-educator).**

Furthermore, Susannah explained that in the years before having children, she and her husband came across some of the ideas associated with home-education, and autonomous learning, via group for "healers (sic)" in Brighton. For Susannah, this experience, painted home-education as a positive alternative to school:

> It was painted something really positive in terms of education and, I as a paediatrician, I have always been very interested in child development…this was way before we had our own kids and it seemed like "gosh, what an amazing thing to do! **(Susannah, home-educator).**

Interestingly, the first social encounter that some parents had with home-education families, did not always posit a 'good image' of home-education, as Abbey demonstrated:

> We had initially met some families who were extremely opinionated and Christian with very black-and-white views on things…these families had a very narrow approach, they taught their children things like Latin…they almost had a mini schoolroom in their house... it seemed to be very controlling, they were frightened of any secular influence…It just really put me off… **(Abbey, home-educator).**

Later, Abbey recalled a more positive encounter with a family who home-educated, while she was undertook here doctoral research on tuberculosis:

> …I spent some time overseas I actually did a PhD on tuberculosis out in Malawi and… there was one particular family who had seven children who were home-educated… the children seemed incredibly well socialised and balanced…**(Abbey, home-educator).**

These findings illustrate that for these parents, discovering home-education at an early stage facilitated a contemplative and sometimes tacit positive disposition towards the possibility of practicing it themselves. Meeting home-educating families and interacting with children and teenagers, sparked and sustained a sense of curiosity, fascination and wonderment. In this way, the alternative of home-education was cast to the foreground as a tacit, yet unrealised utopian possibility.

7.3.2 *Away from school: fascination and amazement*

Being able to envisage home-education as a utopian possibility was, for this group of families, interwoven with their subsequent beliefs about of what school 'was not'. The parental knowledge gained through personal and professional experiences of school (e.g. as pupils and later teachers)

made this insight possible. Notably, several parents within this group recalled passing exams to a high standard, yet later felt as though school had nurtured few of the skills and values useful for life in the 'real world'. For example, regarding her early fascination because of socialising with home-educated children in the family that she met, Esther explained:

> …I did incredibly well at school - I was very good at passing exams. But I didn't enjoy school. I don't think schools are a good preparation for university... I went back in as a teacher and that didn't impress me either so it was great for me to discover that actually I didn't have to send my kids to school…**(Esther, home-educator).**

Further, Claudia who decided to home-educate her children, when her eldest son was 18 months old illustrated:

> [W]hen I was at school, I was the model student. I did really well and then I left school and realised that I couldn't actually do anything, because school hadn't prepared me for real life. It wasn't something that I really thought about too much, but when I had my first child, I was kind of like, "hang on a minute, I have got to send them to school and I didn't learn anything that helps me in my work life, why am I sending them to school?" …We take our children and we lock them away in a day school, in a day prison… that environment is very restricted…**(Claudia, OM).**

Moreover, after the adoption of her first (and later second) child, realising that her son's developmental needs would place him at a disadvantage, enabled Gemma to envisage that school 'would not work' for her family:

> [W]e realised that he had a lot of catching up to do in terms of feeling settled and secure. He had a lot of anxiety and a lot of issues with not being able to understand what anybody was saying to him…it was kind of like a mental block he had. We adopted his sister, and then we realised that it wasn't going to work… **(Gemma, home-educator).**

Susannah's experience of attending school together with the knowledge gained through her role as a paediatrician, shaped her impression of home-education as a better alternative to attending school. In this way, she perceived the decision to home-educate her own children as the right thing to do. As Susannah explained:

> [T]here are other things that come into play... in terms of the negatives of the alternative… As a paediatrician liaising with schools…they didn't want to say "okay this child is a bit different and how can we work with this child in a different way?"… so the child is seen as the problem…It was a combination of those aspects of school that I think one does well to avoid…When we had our own children…it just seemed like the right thing to do… **(Susannah, home-educator).**

Furthermore, as Gail illustrated:

> I got the idea through the experience of my job actually it was an IT consultant and I thought that I wanted to be teacher, so I did some voluntary work and found that school wasn't the best place for children to actually learn and that teachers were really stressed and not happy with the way the national curriculum had been developed and implemented. I realised that

as a completely unqualified adult, I still knew more than the children which was a bit of a revelation and quite self-evident...**(Gail, home-educator)**

Both Gail and Susannah's accounts illustrated a process of social learning (Wenger 1998). By participating in home-education related communities offline, alongside their own biographical experiences and perceptions of school, they imagine or project a future (Wenger 2010). The interplay between pull factors towards home-education and away from school was visible in the positive depiction of home-education, which further elevated the perceived riskiness of school towards their child's social and academic futures. Here, the option of school is framed as the less desirable 'other' considering the possibility of home-education. For instance, as Beth illustrated:

> There are a lot of different reasons why we've chosen to home-educate but the school age at which children start school was a massive part of it...I just envisaged a situation where she would be told to stop asking questions and to sit still... I'd quite like to foster what works for her personality and her learning style and be able to encourage her through that - especially in these early years **(Beth, home-educator)**.

This further substantiates the claim made in *Chapter five* - that home-education was a strategy to protect children from the future loss of social values (see English 2016). Moreover, the 'revelation' described earlier by Gail (p.188), broadly resembled Lees' (2010; 2013) notion of the *gestalt switch*. Originating in Kuhnian philosophy, the *gestalt switch* is a concept that Lees used to describe a critical moment; when parents consciously unlock the gates towards alternative possibilities (see *Chapter two* for further details).

Arguably, knowing what school was not and what home-education could be, relied on this group of parents' experiences of 'doing well' and from their experience of previous occupational roles. As Iona, described:

> When my youngest daughter was four years old she was very clingy. She wouldn't really talk to any other adults. She was hopeless; she couldn't count; she couldn't even write her name! I looked at the 30-point assessment that they do at reception age and I thought to myself...she is going to be labelled slow. I know this because I was a languages teacher in the past...I used to visualise what it would be like when she would come home from school... and then at some point, that feeling and expectation went away... **(Iona, home-educator)**.

What this suggests is, for these families, the decision-making process leading to home-education was framed as a positive and meaningful discovery. However, being able to envisage home-education as both a 'better' and 'different' educational alternative to school relied on parents' high levels of *social* and *cultural capital* (Bourdieu translated in Jenkins 1995). Essentially, the early experiences and subsequent dispositions enabled through the levels of *embodied capital*, (i.e. obtained through occupational roles and parental education levels) meant that some parents were highly committed to the idea of home-education by the time that their children had reached school

age. For this group of families, as time progressed towards their child/children reaching school age (five years), home-education was therefore perceived as an 'obvious,' 'natural' and/or the right choice over the possibility of attending school. As Esther's comments illustrate:

> You know when something just seems like "bing!" It just seemed right. Instantaneous. Why would I not do that, why would I hand my child over to strangers... **(Esther, home-educator).**

The reasons given by parents such as Esther, in some ways, resembled what Morton (2011) used to differentiate what she called 'natural' choice home-educators. Morton (2011) described this as a group of parents, who were:

> [a]mbivalent about the notion of education, often being unclear as to what they thought education was. They were clearer about what they felt the aims and outcomes of education should be, many talked about children fulfilling their individual potential, and there was also a grudging acknowledgement that their children should be able to survive economically (p. 49).

The findings of this research very much echoed what Pattison's (2015) identified as a problematic tension in interviewee accounts of home-education and school. While acknowledging, the variable circumstances of individuals, Pattison (2015) explained that often: "[h]ome-education is presented as being both 'better' than school and, in its uniqueness, 'different' from other forms of education" (p.4). The findings of this study share similarity with the reasons for home-education observed in Pattison and Thomas' (2007) earlier research. Specifically, the home-educators interviewed in their research demonstrated the importance of social and pedagogical reasons for home-education. This encompassed the desire to raise lifelong learners.

Consequently, the clear division between home-education and the seemingly undesirable alternative of school articulated by some of the parents interviewed in this study, shows a clear commitment to the enterprise of home-education outlined in *Chapter five.* As Elaine exemplified:

> What you will find in home-education, is that you have the philosophical home-educators and people who decided, when life was calm and everything was peachy that actually they wanted to educate their children alternatively to the mainstream, they are committed to doing it as a family…**(Elaine, OM).**

Thus far, I have briefly set out two ideal types of decision-making in the interview accounts of how families reached the decision to home-educate. I have called these pre-emptive and reactive types. I have also shown that in the former type, parents frame home-education as a positive and an inherently natural decision. The importance of socialising with existing home-education families offline was particularly pivitol to this process. In the remainder of Section 7.3, I concentrate on how participation in online Yahoo! and Facebook groups intended to support home-education (see

Chapter five) might have changed when some parents chose to commit to the enterpise of home-education.

7.3.3 Towards an earlier commitment to home-education?

Some of the parents interviewed in this research had made the decision to home-educate in the mid to late 1990s. During this time, Yahoo! and Facebook had not yet fully taken off. As discussed earlier, several parents had almost by chance met and established social ties with families, apart from Nadine. Recalling 1997, Nadine, who had been home-educating for 15 years, described the process of following 'trails' on the internet:

> [W]hen I pregnant with my first child, I was researching natural childbirth options and as soon as you start looking at natural childbirth you come across a few nutters who home-educate and I was thinking, "well, I'm all for natural childbirth, but home-education, that's just a bridge too far"… You know, "well, very impressive, but I'm not sure I'd ever do that" …and then by the end of the first trimester. I had decided "yes, I'm going to do this". It was entirely driven by following trails on the Internet...this was in the days before emailing lists...**(Nadine, home-educator).**

Nadine's comments support the observations previously made by Andrade (2008) who alluded to a positive correlation between the availability of the internet and the prevalence of home-education. Given what little is known about the existing home-educating population in Britain, it is almost impossible to substantiate this suggestion. However, as I discuss in Section 7.5 of this chapter, the role of the internet and access to home-education is a complex association, particularly when taking into consideration the mechanisms of organisation and relations between home-educators online that were described in *Chapter six*.

However, in 2013 when this research was carried out, several online moderators remarked that in recent years parents with very young children were requesting to join some of the Yahoo! groups intended to support home-education to establish offline social ties with other families residing in their local area. As Sharon, illustrated:

> Quite a number of parents enquire whilst their child is very small; under four years, and we have had a couple of families who have come to events from when their child was small enough to be in a sling, as this is a lifestyle choice for them… **(Sharon, OM).**

Sam, who currently moderates another Yahoo! group, which supports a local green 'co-operative' style group for families living in Southampton, is an example of parent described by Sharon:

> ..[I] bumped into one of the original members when my daughter was only three and I took a name and number, because I was sort of interested in what they were doing and then I joined the email list very soon afterwards… And then just got very involved in it really… **(Sam, OM).**

Interestingly, several online moderators explained that early networking with local home-educating communities offline had enabled and further cemented family decisions of 'not needing to give school a try'. As examples:

> We seem to have a mixture of people coming through with pre-schoolers, who just don't want to go the school route at all…**(Claudia, OM).**

> [M]ore people are giving it a go. Whereas, 10 years ago they might have thought, but I wouldn't know anyone and I would be all alone, now you get people who are joining these forums when their children or two or three years old, saying "well I'm thinking about it". So, I think those forums are actually helping to increase the numbers who are home-educating…It counteracts the lack of positive images in the media…**(Georgina, OM).**

Moreover, after researching home-education online, and having found the page for her local Yahoo! group, Christie decided to set up her group for local home-educators in her area when her son was four years old.

> [O]ur area is a big geographical area and no one had started a group, so by the time my eldest reached four, I just thought "right I'm going to start my own"…I am very excited about home-educating… **(Christie, OM).**

Arguably, *imagination* as a mode of identification (Wenger 2010) was facilitated through both online and offline interactions with other home-education parents. Through this mechanism, some parents can align themselves to the shared enterprise of home-educate earlier (Wenger 2010). Consequently, this facilitated identification with the enterprise home-education before child reached school age.

Overall, the accounts of pre-emptive decision-making showed that these parents were positioned as what Wenger (1998) would define as *inbound members* of home-education communities when their children were very young. In this way, their positional identities were orientated more explicitly towards participation in the enterprise of home-education practice. On the basis of these findings it could be inferred that through identifying groups online and subsequently participating in activities offline, some families are subsequently committed to the enterprise of home-education much earlier on than was previously possible. Rather than encountering home-education families by chance, the visibility and creation of new networks and communities in home-education means that some families are likely to assume inbound trajectories towards the prospect of home-education as evidenced in the particpation of parents with young children.

However, for some families interviewed, the journey towards the educational alternative of home-education was not easy, nor was it a positive one. As Hayleigh explained:

> You get the people like us who have always thought of home-education and who have done it from the word go and the people who have taken their children out of school for

some reason whatever that reason might be, and often they won't be aware of home-education until they get pushed to the point where they have to do it…**(Hayleigh, home-educator).**

The decision-making process among the kinds of families described by Hayleigh and the special role of new technologies is the focus of my preceding discussion.

7.4   Reactive decision-making

Some of the online moderators interviewed in this research, represented a distinct collection of families who had arrived at the decision to home-educate in very different circumstances to those discussed in Section 7.3 of this chapter. As Elaine clarified:

> …[W]e're also seeing 14-year-old girls typically, who are struggling with self-harm, self-esteem issues, food issues and that group I think are being let down by the mainstream education system… home-education is a knee-jerk reaction from the parents because they literally have nowhere else to go… **(Elaine, OM).**

The findings of this research show a second form of decision-making, which I have called 'reactive' decisions. Notably, the interview accounts of how some parents had come to home-educate, were altogether very different to pre-emptive types. Contrary to pre-emptive decision-making I show that, for some parents, the factors leading towards the decision to home-education were marked by a greater number of reasons *pushing* them towards home-education and *away* from school. The following discussion describes how for the parents in these positions their participation in the 'online landscape' was of significance for what could be conceptualised as the *reification* and subsequent alignment towards the shared enterprise of home-education (Wenger 1998).

For a significant majority of the parents who had withdrawn their child from school, their arrival at the decision to home-educate was not a straightforward or 'obvious' choice. Some of the push factors (outlined in Table 7.2.1) such as their child's experience of bullying and/or the lack of support for their child's additional needs as a learner, had contributed towards a sense in which they felt alienated and let down by teachers, head teachers, and LA personnel in relation to resolving these issues. In extreme cases, parents described themselves as desperate to repair the damage that school attendance had on the social and emotional wellbeing of their children. As Alexa explained:

> A lot of the parents who have withdrawn their kids had previously never considered home-education…They were not even aware that it existed. It was only at a point when they became desperate, and one of the parents was available to take it on that they heard the magic words and went "oh well that might be the answer" and then fished around…By far, the majority of people though in this area are doing it because they are dissatisfied with school…**(Alexa, OM).**

Across these accounts, parents had felt disillusioned and anxious about continuing to send their children to school. Hayleigh for example, describes the escalating difficulties linked to the decision to home-educate her son:

> [H]e has been diagnosed with severe learning difficulties. So, when he was in reception at the age of five, the difference between him and other five-year-olds was there, but it was manageable…but the difference became greater as he got older….he wasn't doing any of the same work as the other children in the class were and the new headmistress came in and she decided that he wasn't coping with the classes - which was true. Her solution was to move him outside of the class and he ended up in a former cloakroom with just a teaching assistant. He became really unhappy, the teaching assistant also became unhappy because she was stuck in a cloakroom with somebody who was cross and he didn't want to be there. It was a difficult job and she didn't have much support and she didn't deal with it very well... It just got worse and worse… **(Hayleigh, home-educator).**

Another mother illustrated the escalating issues that her family faced because of her son's difficulties and perceived failure of the headmistress to implement what she felt were reasonable adjustments for his additional needs. Her son was excluded from school for 'causing mayhem' in her own words. After the exclusion and with a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome confirmed, Jenny and her husband went back to the school and asked if provisions could be made to reduce the stress caused by the class teachers 'drum roll' practice (which involved loud clapping):

> [W]hen an autistic child is that stressed, they can't actually learn properly because their brain is trying to process the noise problem…the headmistress said actually "no we are not prepared to change things for the sake of one child". That was the moment that we realised that we were not going to send him back… **(Jenny, home-educator).**

Moreover, one mother recalled the possibility of being issued with an attendance order; due to her son's persistent absenteeism. The final absence, was due to her son's visit to Accident and Emergency for breaking three toes while at school:

> [W]e had so many problems with the school, they were talking about going to the LA on his attendance. At one point, they suggested sending social services around to help him get dressed in the morning. I didn't want that. Because of all of these referrals and issues, I rang my attendance officer and they asked them "if I pulled him out now…" -bearing in mind I was moving 20 miles away - "what would happen?" and the attendance officer said "to be perfectly honest with you, by the time we would get the referral you would have already moved" … **(Irene, home-educator).**

Furthermore, Fiona describes the process leading to the 'point of no return' as:

> My daughter went through primary school absolutely fine. She is a bilateral hearing aid wearer…We had help from the LA in the form of a teacher for the deaf…she had a special set that she used to wear and the teacher used to wear so that the teacher could communicate with her, but what we actually found was, while the teacher was moving around the classroom, she was needing to lip read to back-up her hearing. To do that, she was physically having to turn round in a chair and follow the teacher around the room…They were also asking her to take notes at the same time. She just couldn't do it….

191

we went to the school and we talked about things that we could possibly do to fix things, which they tried. But honestly, by that stage I think it had got to the point of no return…she had already started to school refuse and had become withdrawn from the family… **(Fiona, home-educator).**

7.4.1 Misalignment towards home-education

This research found that, for some parents, the prospect of an education without school was an insecure and anxious deliberation. This was linked the uncertainty of what the educational alternative of home-education might look like; whether it was achievable, and if it would be successful. As Fiona illustrated:

> [I]t was her that actually first broached the subject of home-education… I'm sure like a lot of parents, or most parents who look at home schooling, it was the reaction of shock horror, no absolutely not, we could not do that! **(Fiona, home-educator).**

Below the surface, reactions such as those expressed by Fiona were connected to perceived misconceptions and a lack of awareness about the practice of home-education, as Verity explained:

> I heard about it and knew it was an option. But I thought it was just an option for social misfits, as in most kids are okay at school but then you find the odd kid that really doesn't fit in in which case they were home-educated. But I didn't think it would be for us because we weren't social misfits **(Verity, home-educator).**

As a result of a very distressing encounter between her niece and a member of a conservative and evangelical home-education family, Elsa's first impressions of home-education had not been positive:

> I always knew it was out there but it wasn't something we seriously considered ever. I mean if you'd even asked me three years ago about home schooling it wasn't even something that was on the radar for us in terms of considering it I mean she went to a private school because we thought well you know paying for it you would get the best…**(Elsa, home educaor).**

Moreover Irene remarked:

> I heard about home-education years ago but then I forgot about it. My sister had looked into it because her son was being bullied...but I wasn't really aware of all the groups and what it involved… **(Irene, home-educator).**

These findings arguably point towards what could be interpreted as a *misalignment* (Wenger 1998) towards the enterprise of home-education. In other words, for some parents, participating in the practice of an education without school, was a possibility which they did not see as compatible with their existing identity as a parent.

The accounts of reactive decision-making demonstrate that for parents who found themselves at a point of crisis, the vision of an education without school was weak. On the one hand, the alienation and disillusionment generated as result of their child's experiences pushed them away from a

strong commitment towards school. At the same time, however, their commitment towards the enterprise of home-education was, at this point, weak. In this way, these families could be conceptualised as on the *periphery* of school - no longer identifying with some of the communities that they once trusted, while at the same time, were *misaligned* towards a vision of home-education as a better and different choice to a schooled education (Wenger 1998). Subsequently, existing in what was depicted as the nexus between school and home-education was lonely and destabilising experience for parents. Grace's remarks illustrated this well:

> When you are on that precipice about to take that jump it is really lonely place to be… I'm confident, you know I succeeded in life, I'm happy, I'm married, have got beautiful children, I want for nothing and it still scared the crap out of me... **(Grace, home-educator).**

These findings suggest that among parents whose initial discovery of home-education is a result of their child's negative experiences of school, most are at first, weakly committed to the idea of home-education.

7.4.2   Finding home-educators online

Participation in the online landscape featured in a unique way in reactive decision-making. Firstly, for many of these parents, the boundary markers described in *Chapter five*, meant that parents could find and discuss their situation online with other like-minded parents who were already experienced in home-education. As Harriet explained:

> The first thing I did when researching home-education, was to go on Mumsnet…and then I went on to Education Otherwise.net, and from there I got to my local Yahoo! group. Then I signed up with the Yahoo! groups and asked for information from the members and they were quite a friendly bunch. I got lots of information from them, and I just started attending the different groups that way. It started off as information, but then I could actually see all of these groups, trips and everything else that was happening, so then you realise actually it's a community. It is an online community, but then you get to meet everybody in the group scenario [offline] as well… **(Harriet, home-educator).**

Firstly, Harriet's remarks further substantiate my earlier proposition (see Section 5.5) that home-educators participate in the landscape of both offline and online communities and networks. Secondly, her comment also alluded to a distinct form of learning that takes place through what Wenger (1998) might identify as *peripheral-participation*. I describe this in greater detail in my following discussion.

For several parents, this was their first social encounter with home-educators. This also led to meeting group members offline. As Georgina explained:

> One of the advantages of a Yahoo! group or a Facebook group is that you can lurk. You can join and not actually post anything, but you can see the kind of traffic that is happening and then you realise that it's just normal parental concerns…It's things like: "if you go this website

you can get a discounted family Railcard", or "Legoland are offering educators 10% less" … that kind of information. You get to thinking, "oh, hang on a moment these are just normal people discussing normal things" … and then you think, "well, they are meeting up in a park near me, I will just go and lurk to see how scary they look" …and then you go and think "well actually, you know what, they look like normal people". I think that must be one of the real safety nets for a lot of people. They can join, and they don't have to say anything, but they can just hear and see the conversation and realise that it is perfectly normal and this is not people talking about how they force their children to sit in a dark room all day doing chemistry sums or something… **(Georgina, OM).**

Participation in 'readymade' networks, dedicated to supporting home-education, afforded some parents on the periphery of home-education and between school, the ability to observe how many different regular educational and social activities take place locally. The effect of this, eased parental anxiety concerning the riskiness of home-education regarding their child's social interaction. Moreover, through peripheral participation in both online and offline domains of practice, some parents learnt that home-educators were 'normal'. Central to this learning process was the realisation of commonalities, between not just a few families but many families. As Fiona illustrated:

I suppose from a parent's point of view, we want to make sure that she had the education that she would have got if she was in school...She broached the subject when she was still in school, so I used that time, without her knowing, to look at the online forums. I spoke to our local coordinators and then visited local groups. It started with a simple Google search, and I found our local home-education page. I filled in the contact details…The local home-educator called me and spoke about all of the different things she did, her experiences, and she suggested some online forums that I joined… they were great. There was also Facebook pages for all of those as well…**(Fiona, home-educator).**

For Fiona, her participation in multiple online Yahoo! and Facebook groups was pivotal to the realisation that she was not alone:

So, having those forums was a really useful way of putting down on paper everything that I needed to say and the answers I needed to get without having to face anybody really I suppose….I read a post where a woman said she was having a really bad day, and then loads of people replied and said that completely normal everybody has a bad day, chill out! That support was really helpful, to know that people had gone through the same thing...So my initial reaction went from one of horror oh well I might be able to do…The thing is, I needed a lot of support, not just from one person, but from many… **(Fiona, home-educator)**

Moreover, at the point of 'family crisis' because of the break down in relations between with her son's headmaster, Grace highlighted how *boundary* markers online symbolised the existence of an otherwise metaphorically invisible community of communities:

[T]hat was the lifeline for me that there were other people out there. And I remember seeing that number thinking "gosh this 269 other families out there doing home-education" …

because you don't see them, why would I see them because… I was at work **(Grace, home-educator).**

Here the feature of the online landscape served to make home-education families 'visible' to parents like Grace, who otherwise would never have established communication with many of these families before this.

Connected to the alienation and anxieties experienced by these parents, Kirsten explained that making the decision to home-educate required *aligning* oneself to an unusual practice. To commit to such an idea requires a lot of support and emotion work on the part of parents:

> Home-education has and probably always will be a minority choice...because it goes against the norm of school. Anything that is a minority choice requires an awful lot of support around it…**(Kirsten, home-educator).**

In some ways, parents such as Kirsten identified themselves as being on the periphery of not just home-education practice, but also the existing communties and networks within which they are also affliated. On the one hand, these parents feel that they no longer could identify with the enterprise of school, yet at the same time, they also did not fully identify with the shared enterprise, repetoires and histories of home-education communities.

7.4.3 Challenging misconceptions and learning possibilities

For the home-educating who lived in rural areas, the support acquired online was essential for helping parents to feel that they belonged to a community with strong ties. As Lorraine showed:

> I travel north a lot because that is where I am from. I am a member of one of the forums that caters for a locality in the [North of England]. That group has a very different feel, because they have very few face-to-face meet-ups. I think for them, just the idea that they belong to a community must be essential really. They do not have a lot of traffic at all, but when a new person will pop up and introduce themselves, and they get welcomes from a few people and before that existed I am sure you could go your whole home ed. career and never meet anybody. Especially in places where people are not widespread **(Lorraine, OM).**

Moreover, several home-educators described how this somewhat abstract image of a community was crucial in cases where they felt that they could not discuss the possibility of home-education with family or friends for fear of negative judgment. For these parents, the process of lurking and sharing stories with others online helped to them to negotiate the boundaries of school and the alternative of home-education. This was evident in the sense of belonging described by participants such as Jenny. Jenny described how her participation in a national Yahoo! group for home-educators with special educational needs helped her to gain a sense of belonging:

> [M]ainstream schools do not work for children with autism… unfortunately...our experiences are not isolated at all. Hundreds and hundreds of families have been through the same, and I discovered some of these families through the online networks. In

particular, [*group name*] …the majority of people on there have children with autism, and if they wrote their stories, they would look so much like ours all over the internet. I found that in actually connecting with them…you start to realise well actually you know, I'm not wrong…and that actually this is a situation that many people are going through, and you know that home-education is one way to say "no, I am taking control of this and I am stopping doing this" and you have the support of those people **(Jenny, home-educator).**

The remark above arguably shows how through her participation; Jenny re-negotiated meaning in the stories of other like-minded families. This, in turn, afforded her with the ability to alter her position, whereby home-education was re-framed as an empowering choice. The knowledgeability acquired online was powerful for parents on the periphery of home-education practice, despite assuming an identity of non-participation. Elsa described that:

It was the community of the local group, even though we haven't done much with them, just knowing that it was out there, there was support and you know talking to a few people…what made me realise that if we did take this path we won't be alone and we could be as involved in the groups as we want, you dip in and dip out as we wished, and just knowing that there is support there...**(Elsa, home-educator).**

Moreover, Elaine highlighted that the immediacy of support offered by multiple home-educators is something that, before the expansion of online networks, was a lengthly process:

I think, if you were waiting for support in the real physical world, you could be waiting for quite some time…the minute you post not only will you get just one person to support you, you will get a whole lot of people too… **(Elaine, OM).**

Furthermore, Kirsten, a deaf home-educator, illustrated how joining a Yahoo! group for home-educators in her area correlated with a newly-acquired confidence and empowerment - an experience that facilitated her decision to deregister her son from school:

I emailed a national home-education charity and asked them if they had details of home-educating groups in [*our area*]… through them, I found [*group name*] and they accepted me into their Yahoo! group…that changed everything… I mean, it took away the fear, it's what gave us the strength to go for it... one week later we took our son out of school, after five and half months at school… **(Kirsten, home-educator).**

In this type of decision-making process, the acquisition of knowledge transmitted by more experienced home-educators online was of significance in facilitating the reframing of home-education as something positive rather than negative. This was illustrated in the remarks of Fiona:

We are very lucky in this area to have some of the real veteran home-educators who are very experienced. Their children have been through the process, they are now at university or in jobs. And actually one of our local home-educators… fights for a lot of people's rights and will take on the LA by the horns should there be a problem… even though her children are no longer in the home-education fraternity as it were.…**(Fiona, home-educator).**

Moreover, the knowledge that Grace acquired through participating in a Yahoo! group helped her to take the leap towards home-education while on holiday with her family. As soon as the plane

had landed, Grace explained, she rang the head teacher at her children's school. Recalling the emotion work and significance of the support she received from one 'experienced' home-educator:

> In the beginning, what you'll find if you speak to any home-educating family, is that leap that you take…it is like jumping on to the other side of a cliff…for me, it was just that one voice saying "you are not on your own we are here, just close your eyes and jump…it's not that far down and when you jump, we will be here to catch you". [H]onestly, I remember reading that going "I can do this!" I still have that email saved in my inbox…I don't know how much she saved our lives that day… **(Grace, home-educator).**

These findings show that the feature of the online landscape among reactive decision-making parents served to strengthen the perception of home-education as a valid and positive alternative to school which in turn facilitated the reframing and alignment towards the project of home-education. This is embedded in the learning processes whereby parents gained a sense of belonging to other members of networks and communities in home-education. In this way, participation facilitates an engagement and an alignment to the shared enterprise of home-education.

7.4.4 Navigating deregistration: LAs and schools

In this chapter, I have described two forms of decision-making leading to families entering home-education. I also highlighted how some parents at this stage were more committed to the project of home-education, while others were aligned to the prospect, though often still positioned between the peripheries of school and home-education (Wenger 1998). For parents who had reached the decision to home-educate reactively, this involved deregistering their child from school. While for some parents, a letter issued to their children's head teacher was a relatively smooth and straightforward process, for others, apparently, this was not the case. As Elaine commented:

> There are barriers against you accessing that whole raft of services that school children can access…**(Elaine, OM).**

More specifically, four online moderators reported cases when parents whose children were statemented had faced difficulty deregistering from school. Alexa narrated a recent issue that involved a parent who withdrew her teenage daughter (who was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome) from school:

> The relationship with the school had really broken down…her daughter was in such distress…So the mother found through the network that there was an alternative and she decided to do it…but then she was pursued by the school…. It got quite nasty and at one point she was getting quite heavy letters... **(Alexa, OM).**

The difficulties experienced by some parents during the process of deregistration was compounded by the loss of specialist support for the additional needs of some learners. As two interviewees showed:

> Quite a lot of the speech and language support for autistic children comes from the schools…so I know that for some parents it can difficult to access again when children leave school… **(Sharon, OM).**

In these situations, participation on the online landscape could enable the acquisition of knowledge from 'veteran' home-educators who had experience in dealing with these issues in the past. Jenny remarked:

> What these groups can do, for example, is help somebody if they are going through that difficult time. We would say 'right, you need to write an educational philosophy'. So, we would all share our philosophies so that people could see what each other had written… **(Jenny, home-educator).**

Moreover, for Alexa, the acquisition of knowledge could also extend offline support through, for instance, attending meetings with the LA personal:

> In the group, we also have another mother, she was a special needs teacher…So she has recently volunteered to answer any queries in relation to Special Educational Needs in this case…so she actually attended this meeting that the mother had with the LA about her daughter to give her support. Because again she can give very knowledgeable inputs which can be very helpful for parents, about the law and special needs this case. So, we have a few amateur experts around who offer their advice when needed… **(Alexa, OM).**

In this way, not only did these parents acquire knowledge of belonging that steered them towards the pursuit of an educational alternative, but to follow on from Lees' (2010) metaphor, they could immediately access a copy of the keys needed to close one gate and open another. Through their participation, parents who otherwise would not have had access to the informational and resources needed to negotiate and ultimately enter home-education. Via parental participation online networks, new technologies were therefore pivotal in navigating a difficult crossroads towards an otherwise inconceivable, educational alternative without school.

7.5 Towards the democratisation of home-education?

Interestingly, some online moderators explained that without the online landscape afforded to networks and groups in home-education, many parents, but particularly those whose children encounter difficulties at school, would have difficulty in negotiating in the meaning sense of what could be viewed as *emotion work* needed to align themselves to the project of home-education:

> I think many people would end up not home-educating if the Yahoo! groups didn't exist. The nervous people who put out a few requests, who are so relieved when they get responses and they find that there are a few home-educators near them with children the same age…or

see that they could fill their week really easily with different activities... I think it is make or for break them. It is the reason they are able to home-educate…**(Lorraine, OM).**

Elaine goes on to remark that in some cases, because some families could network with experienced home-educators online, the lives of some children have been saved. Previously, she exclaimed, that these parents would have not known where to go, or what to do:

> Existing home-educators provide a safety net for new families… Parents who come to home-education as the last resort, at the end of their tether…if it wasn't for the fact that home-education exists and there is a community already in place… I would be as bold to say that lives have been saved… **(Elaine, OM).**

Consequently, Elaine suggested that a new collection of families, for whom home-education would have otherwise been unforeseeable, was contributing to an increase in its prevalence:

> I think we get a lot people now who want to discuss home-education before taking the plunge which is quite interesting. Whereas before we'd have people who had already decided to home-educate… home-education is on the rise generally… I think they are more willing to explore their options because the Internet is there, because it gives them this rich variety of information, that maybe people a few years ago wouldn't have necessarily had access to… **(Elaine, OM).**

The perceived rise in home-education was prevalent theme across 238 qualitative survey responses as well as the interviews. This rise was attributed substantially to the context of 'mainstream' families being able to access the kinds of online networks and groups that I described in *Chapter five*:

> So, 15, 10 or even just five years ago, most home-educators were mostly libertarian anti-government, wanting to do it their own way… What we call philosophical home-educators. Now home-education has become more mainstream…I think the bigger the internet gets, the more likely you are to be able to find your tribe... I came across this term in my breastfeeding days because sometimes when you're joining a group about breastfeeding all you have in common with a list is that your breastfeeding and it's the same with home-educating groups, the one thing you have in common is home-education… **(Becky, OM).**

Additionally, Sharon explained how this online landscape has made home-education more visible:

> If you go back five years, 10 years, it was a much more hidden community. But I think more people are willing to explore that avenue and think about it they were perhaps they were previously… **(Sharon, OM).**

In turn, Kim remarked that access to new technologies would contribute to what she perceived as the continued rise of home-education:

> [M]any more children are and parents are unhappy with school and they're finding out through online groups and social media hat there is an alternative which the schools don't advertise, and the government doesn't advertise...there is a lot of support online to say "no, actually, you can do this, you can home-educate your children and it is possible, and it's not

hard" … Or not as hard as what the government would have you think it is…without a lot of online sites and stuff, people possibly wouldn't find all that out… **(Kim, OM).**

Arguably, these findings support Beck's (2010) proposition that home-education has shifted towards a broader social movement that actively seeks to recruit families from different levels of society. More specifically, one of the reasons why families in Beck's (2010) study did not home-educate was because of the perceived absence or loss of the school community. Evidently, the increased visibility of home-education online, coupled with the apparent accessibility of ready-made networks and communities for some families might mean the difference between beginning a journey that previously, would have been inconceivable.

7.5.1 The paradox of access

In this chapter, I have described how home-education featured in two different types of decision-making. This showed that for some parents, pre-emptive decision-making steered them towards an explicitly *inbound trajectory* towards home-education (Wenger 1998). However, being able to frame the possibility of home-education as something positive and exciting implicated high levels of embodied cultural and social capital (described in *Chapter four*). Reaching the decision to home-educate at an early stage in their child's development was hastened, and their commitment to home-education realised as an effect of networking with families both online and offline. However, across the interview accounts, arguably some home-educators were most likely to act as 'brokers' and 'boundary managers' in the landscape. These home-educators therefore possessed the greatest agency in differentiating between members on the periphery of home-education practice. I return to a comment made earlier by Sharon:

> Some groups insist that you cannot join unless you are committed to home-education as a lifestyle choice, not allowed to join if you are waiting for a school place…**(Sharon, OM).**

The implication is that for some families the effects of boundary making exercised by some home-education groups contradicts the extent to which such spaces are truly accessible to all kinds of parents and families considering home-education. Becky for example, articulated the implications of being unable to contribute to the joint enterprise of a group due to exclusion (Wenger 1998). As Becky exemplified:

> …I think being put in the outgroup, so to speak, is not always helpful, actually it can put people off home-education…I'm on other forums for other things... and every so often you get, "I looked at home-education and I went on this email list and then people were so against schools that I left again" and I've seen things where people said, "I went to the local face-to-face home-education group and the people were just so weird and so anti school, and I'm a teacher so I guess home-education is just not for me." So, there will be extreme outliers of the group, so they will actually back right off and not home-educate and choose to keep their

children in school which is fine, and then there will be others who will just leave them to find their own tribe somewhere else… **(Becky, OM).**

This therefore demonstrates that new technologies can facilitate high levels of bonding capital (Putnam 2000), while at the same time, reduce levels of bridging capital. This problematizes the extent to which new technologies have truly democratised home-education practice in terms of the families able to access the groups who constitute it. Evidently, participating in the landscape is vital for families who otherwise might never have come to learn of home-education as a valid alternative to school. I discuss these findings and what they might mean for the field of digital education research further in *Chapter nine*.

In this section, I have shown that for families who reactively reach the decision to home-educate, the role of online networks and new technologies is of special significance. For this group, I highlighted how participation in the online landscape served to normalise the prospect of home-education. Crucially the transmission and acquisition of knowledge through the imagined community and sense of belonging, facilitated the negotiation of meaning and alignment which enabled these families to transition between boundaries of school and home-education. Thus in some ways, new technologies may have democratised home-education through increasing visibility of the practice to parents, who otherwise may not have envisaged it as a credible alternative to school. However, the boundary strengthening practice by home-education groups in the landscape might limit to the extent to which home-education has been rendered truly available to all families.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that there are a variety of reasons for home-education. For the families in this research, there was not a single factor for home-education, but rather push factors and pull factors which simultaneously underpinned the decision. The analysis of push and pull factors revealed two ideal types of decision-making: pre-emptive and reactive. These different decision-making processes highlighted that when they start home-education, some families possess an inbound trajectory and strong commitment towards the project of home-education. This position reflected a combination of embodied cultural and social capital acquired through networking with other home-education families primarily offline. This relatively privileged position was strengthened through new technologies in allowing parents in this group to reach the decision to home-educate at an earlier stage in their child's development. I suggested that new technologies might have made home-education more accessible through the knowledge that enables parents to imagine themselves doing home-education, especially in relation to reactive decision-making. However, the prospect of opened gates for all is problematic when considering some of the exclusionary practices that can take place at the point of boundaries in the landscape. In the next

chapter (*Chapter eight*), I describe the participation of parents, children and young people in the landscape as they navigate through key moments in the pedagogic life of home-education.

Chapter 8 : Forging a common pathway: the pedagogic life of home-education

8.1 Introduction

This chapter is a story about struggles, discovery, negotiation and learning in the landscape of practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Through this account, I explain how the intended pedagogic practices of home-educators are enabled, maintained and ultimately strengthened through shared knowledge and resources. It is also a narrative about the experiences of learners who also participate and thus mutually constitute what I argue is a common pathway. To do this, I draw on the interview accounts of parents, children, and young people who describe different points in their home-education journey. To reflect the key points in this trajectory, the chapter is organised into three main parts. Part 8.2 focuses on the challenges and features of new technologies and how these affect parents and young learners in the early stages of home-education. Specifically, I draw attention to the array of experiences of different parents and learners who hold distinct needs and interests. Section 8.3 explores the collective accounts of families who have been home-educating, on average, for four years or more. It examines the encounters and kinds of resources unique to families towards the middle of their home-education trajectory. In the final sections, I analyse the accounts of parents and learners nearing or at the end of their home-education to explain the kinds of identities and pedagogic transitions considering the shared values and goals for home-education described by parents in *Chapter five*. This narrative shows educators and learners travel along a common pathway. This journey facilitates the transition from invisible to visible forms of pedagogy as learners grow up (Bernstein 1979). It is also transformative for the ideologies of parents and the identity of learner. At the same time, however, it is demonstrated that this journey is not one free from surveillance, power and control. In doing so, I surface several tensions and contradictions in the ideological foundations and social function of home-education itself.

8.2 Starting out…

> ... [Y]ou do not know what sort of cliff it is that you are jumping onto. It could be thousands of feet down, you just don't know and taking that leap takes an awful lot of courage…
> **(Grace, home-educator)**

For families beginning their home-education journey, both parents and learners face a set of unique challenges connected to the process of giving up work and finding a style of home-education to suit the interests and needs of their children. This section discusses these issues and how these

are tackled using knowledge acquired online. I also highlight what this means for the pedagogical practices and identities of families in the early stages of their home-education.

As outlined in *Chapter five*, the decision to home-educate often coincided with changes to employment and, likely, the household income of some families. Typically, for two-parent households, the responsibility of home-education was most likely to be assumed by mothers. Taking on the majority role of home-educator and parent necessitated working part-time or, in most cases, giving up work all together. The implications of having to live on a significantly reduced income compounded the sense in which home-education commanded a significant change in familial lifestyle. This was observed in the accounts of parents who, at the time of the interview, had recently begun home-educating to those who had been home-educating for longer (2-5 years). To illustrate, Holly and Fiona, both previously earning a high income, illustrate the impact of giving up their careers on their families' lifestyle:

> I was the major wage earner, and I gave up work…Obviously, that is hard, particularly when you are in an area like the one we are in now because obviously, it is a wealthy area. It is really expensive to live around here. It is expensive to do things…**(Holly, home-educator).**

> The downside for me and for my husband was that I had to give up work. I was working about 25 hours a week, which is part-time I suppose. But we still had to drop that money as a wage. You have the added financial pressure…**(Fiona, home-educator).**

Moreover, Jenny remarked that the reduction in household income resulted in a home move:

> It is certainly affected my partner and my life in terms of our jobs and how we live…we had to leave our pretty house with our expensive well-paid jobs…We really had to question our lives and what we are doing and how we live, but for us, it is just been an enormous change in the way we are… **(Jenny, home-educator)**

Crucially, the reduction in household income, also led others such as Cerian, to worry about how they were going to afford to purchase resources for their children:

> [W]hen I first started doing home-education, I was thinking […] but I will have to get loads of books? I have to work [this] out because it will cost me a fortune in paper… **(Cerian, home-educator).**

This added financially pressure exacerbated the worry that families had to do 'more with less.' A component of this is not just in purchasing resources, but also in finding affordable 'social' and 'culturally enriching' activities for learners (Lareau 2003). For example:

> I do not have any doubts about my abilities to home-educate - my only major concern is that my eldest is very, very social just like I was when I was young chatterbox so I think only time is going to tell whether is the best option for him… **(Beth, home-educator).**

Arguably, it can be inferred that it was not just this loss of economic capital that was a challenge for parents, but also the destabilising emotions associated with making such a decision. Crucially, for parents who reactively made the decision to home-educate (see Section 7.4) the unknown is likely to be a riskier endeavour. For most of the parents that I interviewed, navigating these new domains of practice was an uncertain time in their lives (Wenger 2010). Assuming responsibility for their child's education surfaced insecurities and internal pressures that some parents had never experienced before. As described in the previous chapter (*Chapter seven*) the nexus between the boundaries of school and home-education practice was a stressful process for some parents.

8.2.1 Family reactions, alienation, and anxiety

Several home-educators and online moderators told of the hostility and opposition they had received from some of their relatives and friends when they had broken the news about their family's decision to home-educate. Outside opposition was explicitly connected to the perception that home-educating a child would hinder their social and/or academic development and/or that it was simply a strange and illegal choice. As examples:

> When I started home-educating I did feel really pushed into it by my son really… But people said, "I cannot believe she is doing that to her son." Some people were vehemently against it. There was that thing you know that you're either hot housing, or you are not following the rules…**(Vicky, home-educator).**

> My own sister thought that home-educating was illegal. For years, she thought that we were doing something illegal and secret…**(Gemma, home-educator).**

In some cases, participants told how family members had proclaimed that home-education was simply the wrong thing to do. This lack of sympathy and perceived understanding further compounded the sense of alienation felt by some parents at the start of their home-education journey. For parents in these situations, the network support from the imagined community was important in 'getting through' such difficult times:

> [W]hen you take your first steps into home ed, when you feel really anxious and when you are not sure that you are going to get it right or be good enough and when all of your relatives tell you not to do it including all of your friends and every taxi driver has an opinion about whether you should home-educate your children. These people really help you to get through those really difficult times...**(Jenny, home-educator)**

8.2.2 The learning of alternative approaches…

A common theme that emerged in the parental interview accounts was the initial concern that home-educating might impact the subsequent socialisation of learners. Parents described 'going flat out' to find out about local events and activities for their children to participate in offline. As Fiona illustrates:

> Now that we are home-educating, I am meeting more and more people that home-educate…I suppose it is like any group that you are attached to, that once you get into that group, then you start to learn more about it and others that are doing the same thing… **(Fiona, home-educator).**

However, the newly found possibilities that home-educating could entail required reframing assumptions and dispositions about education, learning and school. In other words, to access the apparently limitless possibilities of freedom, choice and autonomy for learners, demanded some parents reflect and revaluate their own previously held dispositions. For example:

> When we first started home-educating I felt the need to emulate school if you like… **(Jenny, home-educator).**

Interestingly, reading blogs and exchanging conversations with more established 'autonomous' home-educators online, was cited by some parents as an important starting point in the learning of what an education without schools could be like. This helped parents to discover alternative philosophies, styles and approaches such as: 'unschooling', 'child-led' and 'autonomous' education. To illustrate:

> At the beginning, I was not really aware of the whole radical unschooling philosophy…for us that has come from some of my friend's blogs... We can see what they are doing, although they don't do anything in a structured way, they document what they are learning …and it kind of makes you realise well actually they are learning from what some people see as play. It makes you realise that there are other ways of doing things that you might not necessarily have thought of **(Harriet, home-educator).**

> I'd always planned from the beginning that we would follow the rough guidelines of the curriculum with Maths and English…That is the plan to start with, but we might find it's not working in a structured way…again from reading online, I understand that it might not work for her in that way...**(Elsa, home-educator).**

The acquisition of increased online knowledge about what might and might not work for their child, based on the sharing of experiences of more established families, was further strengthened in the transition towards becoming a member of local neighbourhood groups. Crucially, parents could socialise with families who followed a variety of approaches. In turn, this facilitated a changed perception in learning and the very meaning of education itself.

Parents who had experiences a more traditional education' with demarcated subjects changed their conception of education and moved towards a less traditional form- where the curriculum was more integrated. As was discussed in the previous *Chapter eight*, the changes in attitudes, dispositions, and values towards what education can or should look like without schools, was considered as a form of identity disturbance. Crucially, locating and participating in home-education networks, initially online and then offline, helped these parents to reframe their ways of thinking about

education. In this way, parents assembled common reference points, from which they began to identify with the duality of acting as both a parent and a home-educator:

> It's helped me to see things in a different way.... you know, basing learning on what you want to do rather than doing what you're told to do...You have to look at your child as an individual and what's right for them...Even if you asked me how we would approach it six months ago, I started off by saying, we will do it for six months and then she will take her 11+ and hopefully go to a good grammar school... now I think we might not do that... **(Elsa, home-educator).**

> I think being around with other families who home-educate... their children know as much, if not slightly more, than my children...even though they do not do any formal learning. So, that makes me realise that you do not necessarily always have to be in control of learning for it to happen because children are natural learners. I was quite ingrained in the education system, thinking 'well you have to plan everything' ...They just get it all out of doing things. It is part of the learning process...**(Harriet, home-educator).**

The effects of acquiring a ready-made network of home-educators and participating in activities with local home-educating communities offline helped to facilitate identifying with a more informal and child-led style of education. As Irene illustrates

> [I]t has changed my way of thinking totally because I can now see education in everything. Even when a child is playing, it involves learning. It is just something that has happened...once you are into the swing of home-education, you can turn a normal day out into an extended educational opportunity...being around families and watching their children has really proved that it can work **(Irene, home-educator).**

Arguably, the findings of this research therefore show that through learning, social networking both online and offline enabled some parents to establish a non-normative way of thinking about education that might not have been otherwise possible.

8.3 On pedagogy: visible to invisible

Among the families whose children had left school to be home-educated, several described adopting the strategy of 'deschooling.' While, this term is synonymous with 'unschooling', it was described by parents as an early period in home-education where children were given the opportunity to recover from rigid routines, social pressures and expectations previously felt in school. The unofficial rule of thumb, I was told, was a month for every year said child had been in school. Thus, for a child in year seven, his/her deschooling process could last up to 7 months. This rule of thumb, was something which parents had learnt through their participation in online and offline groups:

> Quite a lot of people get paranoid and feel that they have to do 9-5 everyday... like ourselves, people may start off using those resources, quite often when they have got over that first period when their child recovers from the damage that has been done at school...But people come to realise that you don't have to copy school, that you can be

autonomous, that children can lead their own learning. Children can learn without books or rigid curriculum…that you can learn through a whole range of resources and activities. So, those experienced home-educators in the groups provide vital support mechanisms when going through that situation… **(Beth, home-educator).**

A lot of people talk about on these online groups Well I think it's just the chance to decompress from the rigidity of schools you know them lining up, putting a hand up to speak and all those sorts of things associated with school… **(Elsa, home-educator).**

Crucially, in the proceeding discussions, I will show how participation in the landscape facilitates the transition from tightly-framed sequence and pace (emulating school at home), towards more loosely framed weak sequence and pace (deschooling) pedagogies.

After an initial foray of trying to implement more of a school-at-home approach, many subsequently adopted semi-structured or unstructured methods of home-educating. This practice varied substantially between home-educating families:

It was pretty much the most soul compounding depressing experience of my childhood…at first I did like a school detox, to get the school out of me… which sounds like you are just being lazy but seriously like if someone told me to do something that I didn't want do every part of me would just seize up… It's like my whole essence to shut down **(Cole, home-educated teen).**

Home-education is not, sitting down at the table at 9 o'clock with your books, it's actually working when she can because of issues and her anxiety. That is sometimes at night. Sometimes her sleeping patterns change and she sleeps during the day and then works that night. So, it has really given us the flexibility for her to work as and when she can. I think it this stage what I was very aware of is that with her anxiety issues if she doesn't learn to manage it properly now it will plague her for the rest of her life. So, within this time of de-schooling, we looked at techniques she could use to manage that anxiety and stress **(Fiona, home-educator).**

Fiona's comments arguably show a mother who is engaged in the 'monitoring and repairing' of their child's education (Reay et al., 2011, p.5). This further substantiates the proposition made in *Chapter seven*; chiefly that home-education is perhaps a protective solution to the experienced riskiness of school.

Moreover, at the start of their home-education, learners were said to have been given a greater degree of agency in deciding what to learn (sequence) and when they learned (pace) for an unspecified period (Bernstein 1975). This was evident in the accounts of evidence from parents and learners. For example, Billie, who was home-educated from the outset recalls:

When I was younger, we never did proper work…we just did projects and stuff, learning about things I was interested in... Some days we wouldn't work at all, some days we would go to the beach because it was too sunny to work. It was very relaxed, there was never any specific way of doing anything. It was very unstructured from what I remember and then once I got to 11 or 12 years old, it started picking up the pace… **(Billie, home-educated teen).**

Subsequently, in reflecting on her young children's current experiences of home-education, Abbey explained:

> Freedom, it feels like a real childhood it's free of targets, it's free from constraints and rigid things…and at the same time there's a real hunger for knowledge. I love the fact that it's just integrated into life and it just feels natural and free… **(Abbey, home-educator).**

8.4   Middle of the road

For 37 families who had been home-educating for four years or more, the process of maintaining the enterprise brought with it a unique set of challenges. In the following sections of this chapter, I explain how parents and learners utilised different networks and communities. The effect of which, I will argue, facilitated the continued engagement and identification with the enterprise in home-education. Without this, the home-education journeys for some families might have ended.

8.4.1   Having a wobble

Among the parents who had been home-educating for four years or more, several recalled bouts of panic and doubt that unexpectedly surfaced from time-to-time. These reactions required the emotional and social support from other home-educating parents. This was connected to the challenges of not being able to visibly assess or precisely determine their child's academic and social development:

> I guess the greatest challenge is my own prejudice from the past and fighting off my fears... now and again, I panic and worry and think, oh my God, what are we doing? Am I making things worse for my son? Would he be better off at school? Would he be happier? Would he have many more friends? Would he know a lot more? **(Kirsten, home-educator)**

Interestingly, the accounts directly above echo Pattison's (2015) observation that home-education is paradoxically 'better' and 'different'; as previously demonstrated, parents seek a different approach through home-education. However, their anxieties inevitably centre around implicitly comparing if their child is performing 'better' or 'worse' than their schooled counterparts.

Once more, reading blogs and sharing stories online featured as source of reassurance for parents. Rhiannon explained:

> Partly, I use blogs to calm myself down… When I think, 'oh God what are we doing? They are learning nothing and this is all terrible.' And then you go online look at what someone else has put about their day and it makes you think about what you've actually done a bit differently. **(Rhiannon, home-educator).**

Evidently, delivering forms of pedagogy, with loosely defined subjects was a time-consuming and difficult for the educators, precisely because the criteria for evaluation are multiple and diffuse (Bernstein 1975, p.9). In other words, for parents the process of not being able to measure their

child's academic progress exacerbated their worries about whether home-education was improving their child's development. Balancing the role of motherhood alongside the role the role of educator, was often described as a wonderful yet all-consuming and exhausting job. Consequently, this new way of life left little opportunity for child-free 'alone' time.

The all-consuming nature of motherhood and home-educating was particularly acute for parents whose children possessed additional learning needs. Arguably, one could interpret these challenges as akin to experiences of boundary interruption in that they challenge, or could potentially hinder parents from families fully committing to the endeavour of home-education. At this point, the identity of home-educators is still situated on the periphery, between home-education and school. Their subsequent commitment to the idea of home-education at this stage is arguably weak including how they could extend the nature and kinds of social and educational activities for their children. The specific challenges presented uniquely from family to family.

> I have nine other children now, and my attitude was one out, all out. The whole lot are home-educated. The ones who've never been to school, I now see a difference in because they are thirsty for knowledge, and want to learn. They have an entirely different attitude to education, even compared to the ones who went to school only for a short period…**(Elaine, OM).**

The findings of this study echo Safran (2008) previous work on the experiences of long-term home-educating parents in England and Florida. Safran (2008) points out that the responsibility of educating your children, alongside the marginality of practising home-education, contributes to what is a highly emotionally charged interpersonal context for parents. Moreover, it is an interpersonal context that places one's self at the centre stage. The enormity of balancing the responsibility of a child's education in addition to being a good mother was invoked a level of anxiety like no other. Many parents described moments when they had seriously considered giving up and sending their children to school.

Interestingly, in her application of the CoP model, Safran (2008) argued that Wenger's account of how people come to identify with the joint enterprise of the group is somewhat narrow in that it does not fully explain how this is related to other secondary pressures such as the time and commitment needed to participate in different communities. Crucially, she suggests that this can, in turn, shape the degree to which some parents come to *align* themselves with, or slip away from, home-education groups (Safran 2008).

8.4.2 Finding the 'right' home-education group

In a landscape constituted by multiple and different domains of practice, finding the 'right' group was significant for supporting the local practices of families.

It's also a challenge knowing families better because there is more scope of falling out. We've had a few tricky years after a clash with one family…It was difficult working that out because they were going to a lot of the same groups that we went to… **(Gail home-educator).**

Where we live there tends to be certain families that attend everything. But we have since found out that you can attend smaller groups where people tend to stick together. Previously, we were going to drama club… and my son was physically and verbally bullied for the whole term… the kids were just left completely traumatised… we have since tapped into another little pool of home-educators. They seem a bit more alternative…more nurturing…We found out about them through the different groups we are part of on the Internet. And now we're just trying to focus on going to those things… **(Gemma, home-educator).**

The extent to which home-educated children enjoyed participating in offline home-education groups was dependent on who ran and attended the local home-education group, as well as how the group itself was organised and structured. Cole and Steven, describe some of the local home-education groups that they attended as 'total chaos' due to a lack of structure (particularly in groups with young children):

[I]t depends on the group, and who was running it…the right sort of people kind of thing… **(Cole, home ed. teen).**

It does, because some of the groups were just chaos… You kind of have to have some level of structure to it until they get older, between like 10 and 14…it is not a time just to be wandering round with a bunch of people your own age not achieving anything in a hall... **(Steven, home ed. teen).**

Moreover, one home-educated child explained his frustration with one of the offline groups that his family attended. Central to this was that two parents in the group had decided the weekly activities of the group without informing the other members online first:

I don't really like what is happening to the group now because it is turning into more of a performing group… It is often just this woman and another woman deciding what we do, without informing everyone else…They didn't post on the Yahoo! group and went ahead without telling us… **(Rosa's son, home ed. teen).**

Thus, as time passes, some home-educators and their families, for a variety of reasons, may no longer come to see the value of participating in certain home-education communities offline. This echoes Saran's observations on Communities of Practice in home-education:

Some enterprises may require more time, more emotional commitment, be necessarily more central to a member's life, or any combination of these than others...The home-education joint enterprise and therefore home-education communities of practice may be more central to a member's life than other communities of practice they are in, because of the emotional attachment to the joint enterprise and the marginal nature of the community (Safran 2008, p.211).

However, for some parents who were not able to 'find the right group' for their children to attend, the availability of Yahoo! and Facebook meant that they could set up and advertise their own. As Ryan explained:

> The trouble with home-education groups is that you don't always get the right group of kids there and quite often groups end up as places that are quite cliquey...I now run a group with another home-educating father… the group has a couple of rules in that nobody can tell you what to do. We have had families come. It is not about belonging to networks, or cliques and exclusive friendship circles…. [W]e've had a couple of parents pull out their children because…some aren't willing to give their children the kind of freedom to do fuck all for five hours… **(Ryan, home-educator).**

The findings of this research suggest that parental participation in Yahoo! and Facebook groups enabled home-educators to arrange an individualised learning context for their children in a way that was not previously possible prior to the expansion of online networks and communities within home-education. Thus, the information capital acquired online (Jenkins 1995), enabled parents to arrange several future activities that would have otherwise been difficult to do, for economic and social reasons. For instance:

> We are also very blessed with the online forums that I am part of, they do tend to post useful links to home-education sites and resources and then I have a spreadsheet that I save with all of that information on. Anything that anyone has found useful, I stick on the spreadsheet to have a look at later…**(Fiona, home-educator).**

It could therefore be inferred that in some ways the secondary sites of acquisition afforded through participating in some kinds of neighbourhood groups (Safran 2008) facilitated the acquisition of an *expressive code* that enables acquisition of certain values, norms and states of being that parents wish to transmit. In this respect, while subjects are explicitly weakly *classified* and *framed*, the cultural transmission of social values may be strengthened through participation in these groups (see *Chapter four).*

8.4.3 Watching them play…

Interview accounts which described home-education practices as being rooted in communities also asserted the social ties of child/home-educated learners were 'better' than those they would have developed at school. Interviewees commented on the weakly-framed structures within some of these online groups when they referred to the fact that their children were socialising with not just children their age, but a variety of children and parents of different ages. Seeing this happen, reaffirmed their view that their children were more 'free' than they would have been at school. As discussed previously, 'watching play' is an important part of assessing the development of learners at this stage. However, for some parents, being continually available to identify and provide learning

opportunities was very time-consuming, particularly in families with multiple home-educated learners with different needs and interests. As examples:

> When I'm cooking dinner, I can watch them out in the garden and they don't know when I'm watching them. Watching them play, completely free, free to do their own imaginary play and to just have that freedom to play in whatever way they want. Quite often those magic moments are when they play on their own, you see them sitting on the swing singing as loud as they possibly can. It is a magic thing to be able to see… **(Cerian, home-educator).**

> I think it is brilliant how my children socialise, especially the way they welcome and introduce new children into the group. They are very good at interacting with people of all ages. …They make most of their friends through the group; they often make friends through other things like hockey, but it is not the same because they do not see those children all the time…The friends I get on with, have similar attitudes and a similar outlook on life. So, we do not have a car through choice. We recycle as much as we can. We just have that general outlook of sharing and being nice to everybody. New families that come into the group were amazed at all the children playing together, playing the same game and enjoying it. So, although the children have their own friendships, because myself and this other mum have encouraged the children to play together, you get everyone to muck in… **(Trish, home-educator).**

The illustrations depicted by Cerian and Trish resonate strongly with Bernstein's (1975) account of surveillance in invisible pedagogy. On the invisibility of pedagogy in infant education, Bernstein considers the inferences about the developmental stage that teachers draw from the ongoing behaviour of the child. He describes readiness and busyness as areas of high visibility for teachers. Central to this, is the concept of play. Bernstein (1975) writes that play "is the means by which the child exteriorises himself to the teacher. Thus, the more he plays and the greater range of his activities', the more the child is made available to the teacher's screening" (p.10). Moreover, it follows that to the home-educators, a non- 'doing' child is the equivalent of non-reading child (Bernstein 1979, p4).

Interesting, home-educators watching their children play extended to the selection and use of online games. As Verity explained:

> My daughter goes on a game at the moment called mushy monster, and she talks to a lot of her friends that…you create your own monster and then to buy things for your monster you have to earn rocks, and to earn the rocks you have to do Maths puzzles and there is a time limit on it…she tends to be on there more for social reasons rather than education, because you can actually make friends with other monsters and the owners of those monsters around the world… **(Verity, home-educator).**

Similarly, Irene commented:

> He was not supposed to get Facebook until he was fourteen...but there are so many good educational games on there and I know he misses his school friends. He is usually very good; he always checks with me first and I have added his friends on my account too…he

doesn't know it but I am usually in the background keeping an eye out **(Irene home-educator).**

Crucially, self-surveillance and the docility in the relations between a home-educator and home-educated learner is inherently different to the explicit mechanisms of power and surveillance between the teacher and pupil within the classroom. In these forms of pedagogy, the home-educated learner never knows when he or she is being 'assessed'. This can be a somewhat totalising form of power, because it necessitates a tacit level of self-policing that constant and unrealised.

Thus, the mechanisms of power and control could be said to instil a different kind of structure, rather than the absence of structure. In this way, the findings of this research suggest the pedagogic relations fostered within styles of home-education do not support the rhetoric that unstructured or even semi-structured styles of home-education are freer, and thereby better than those that exist within the classroom. Rather, they are different, and the issue of which structure is better or worse is in some respects a different question altogether.

Interestingly, these observations challenge what John Holt refers to as 'progressive teachers' due to the inconsistencies and contradictions that are implicated for learners. As Meighan (2007) phrases, it: "[t]hey speak the language of freedom, but there are hidden controls and hidden agendas" (p.42). Holt (1997) infers that the 'so called' free teacher urges children to look for clues. Not knowing what it is they are looking for, can be exhausting to the child.

At the same time, however, Holt (1997) concedes that there is no such thing as an unstructured social encounter, and/or learning system. It follows, however that some structures are 'less restricting than others'. Holt claims that to clearly define what a child may not do, rather than instructing them on what they 'must do' apparently offers a less restrictive, and by implication, a freer setting in which to imagine and to express themselves. Arguably, the tension here lies in implicit and explicit relations of power and control, observable in the exchange between the transmitter (home-educator) and the acquirer (the home-educated learner). Bernstein's framework for invisible pedagogy is useful here because it helps to explain the processes of what is happening between the home-educator and the home-educated learner.

Much of the writing on home-education by authors such as Fortune-Wood (2005) to some extent Meighan (2002), is concerned with highlighting the ineffectiveness and limiting arrangement of the pedagogic relations and generalised model of learning within schools. Propositions of an alternative 'unlimited' school-less future, are tied to the dichotomy of 'more or less,' 'better or worse.' This is

perhaps an overtone that fuels the rhetoric of 'unstructured' as synonymous with freedom for the learner. However, the findings of this research surface a much more complex arrangement to which the learner acquires choice, autonomy and 'freedom.'

8.4.4   Delivering a more efficient and suitable education?

As I began to set out in Section 8.4.3, forms of invisible pedagogies require a great deal of surveillance on the part of the home-educator. Due to the loosely organised 'curriculum' and weak evaluation criteria (classification and framing), meant that home-educators adopted alternative strategies to assess their child's education and social development. Literacy and numeracy development were key areas of skill that home-educators sought to survey in their children.

In schools, SATs are exams used to quantify and assess the attainment of pupils in traditional school environments at 'Key Stages' in the pupil's education, and are taken at approximate ages 7, 11 and 14. For families whose children were at or nearing the age when their schooled counterparts were taking SATs exams, some home-educators described moments when they wanted to 'double check' that their children were at a similar level to where they would have been if they had been attending school. At the same time, they did not want to force formal sit down work for fear that it would 'turn off' their child's individual interest and thirst for learning.

> It was not until I started doing it, but I realised, hang on a minute we are in the age of technology, and this is going to make it more possible... I know families who have very limited technology use. But then I noticed the mum has this nightmare guilt feeling she has not marked the work for a while because life has been on top of her, and there is no way of knowing the kids are getting it right or not...With things like Khan Academy it is so much easier to check from time-to-time where they are at **(Cerian, home-educator).**

Thus, in addition to the function of neighbourhood groups as 'secondary sites of acquisition', some parents utilised new technologies to supplement implicit forms of assessment.

Interestingly, these findings uncover a tension with offering learners more choice, freedom, and autonomy within a different structure to that of the traditional school. In 'Freedom and Beyond,' Holt described the permanent tensions between two 'conflicting pulls':

> Too little and it is hard to get anything done, or find anything to do. Too much, and we spend more time keeping things orderly than in doing anything with them. Some people are by nature more tolerant of disorder than others (Holt 1972: 34 cited in Meighan 2007, p.43).

In this way, new technologies within home-education practices could function as a way for parents to negotiate the seemingly permanent tensions of attempting to provide learners with more freedom, while at the same time, managing their anxieties about not 'getting enough done.'

In *Chapter seven* it was shown that many home-educators and online moderators interviewed described how YouTube often featured in the educational practices of home-education families. Typically, home-educators themselves, found YouTube useful for introducing or reinforcing pre-existing learning topics of interest to their children. However, this technology also featured in their self-directed learning experiences, initiated by learners themselves. As Willow explained (in reference to online videos about music):

> They have helped me learn piano. I like it because they give me something to aim for, it helps me to set goals that I can work towards. So, I can say I want to learn this by then (**Willow, home-educated teen).**

Moreover, Gail's daughter, a home-educated teen, explained that she preferred a self-directed approach facilitated by YouTube tutorials for learning how to play instruments as opposed to being taught by her mother. Crucially, being able to 'work things out' to identify and practice techniques in her own time was important:

> I am teaching myself, I don't like being taught instruments so I am going to teach myself violin which is going to be hard…I teach myself by finding videos online, and then working out how to do things… So I use YouTube videos a bit and then diagrams and stuff which is how I taught myself Ukulele… It's just easier learning it myself in my own time. I don't like you when you teach me things... I do not like mum teaching me things because she is a rubbish teacher… **(Gail's daughter, home-educated teen).**

This supports McAvoy's (2015) conviction that availability of new technologies offers some home-educated learners a more personalised form of curriculum.

8.4.5 Learners: working on the self

One of the challenges of being a home-educated young person was a sense that learners had to try to maintain social connections. As Stephanie explained:

> At school, you get given your friends on a plate, whereas in home-education when you get older things like Facebook are really important for staying in touch with everyone…Many of my friends live across the country and I don't get to see them regularly **(Stephanie, home-educated teen).**

Moreover, learners like Byron, who lived in the rural English countryside illustrates that Facebook was a lifeline in that it meant he was not totally cut off from his friends:

> [F]or me Facebook is kind of like a social lifeline…I am an only child...I have a lot of stuff to do. So, a lot of the time my only contact with friends for like days or weeks will be through Facebook. Without Facebook or Skype…I would be completely socially isolated… **(Byron, home-educated teen).**

Interestingly, several of the home-educated young people that I spoke to recalled setting up their own networks online, often organised around an area of mutual interest.

> I was a competitive figure skater from the ages of 13 to like 17 so… I'd meet people at international competitions and we'd exchanged details… then I started a forum which a lot of people joined and I met people in like Texas and Connecticut and lots of places in America and Australia….[B]ecause I was home-educated, I could stay up late and talk to all of these people, because there were time differences…I was also able to plan and organise everything myself, whereas at school, if you are doing textiles or art, you would have to stop what you are doing and then only come back to it in a week's time…I could decide when I wanted to work on my costumes, and when to do English... **(Julia, home-educated young person).**

Moreover, Julia further remarked:

> I met lots of friends there like we all were very creative people… I used to make dresses, like figure skating dresses and I would post pictures of them online and get feedback... And then eventually people ordered them off me and then I started selling them…I think making friends online gives you the confidence to make friends in real-life… **(Julia, home-educated young person)**

Julia's experiences highlight the ways in which establishing and participating in a knowledge network, through which she drew on the experience and expertise of others, helped to cultivate her interests in costume design. Through forming this business, she also practiced a repertoire of life skills, which she has since utilised at university (see section 8.7).

At this point in their family's journey home-educated teens and young people, positioned their participation in online networks and virtual communities as learning experiences that enabled identity work (Wenger 2010). For example, playing online games facilitated building confidence and self-esteem from the social skills they had practiced online. Moreover, some young people recalled being inspired to read after not being able to play online games efficiently:

> I learnt how to read by being inspired by some of the online games that I was playing... I was playing Runescape, and I was so young […] but I should have been able to read at some point… But at that point, I was completely illiterate, and I started playing Runescape, and I realised that I could not play efficiently because I could not read what was happening… So, I literally sat down with this book, and I thought 'right I need to start learning this.' **(Evan, home-educated teen).**

> I learnt about two-thirds of my vocabulary through playing World of Warcraft… Unnecessarily archaic language… **(Cole, home-educated teen).**

Arguably, these findings suggest that through increased access to new technologies, home-educated teens created their own social networks wider than local home-education groups. Moreover, in setting up and participating in their own networks, learners extended and further personalised their learning environments. This is broadly supportive of McAvoy's (2015) assertion that the internet is likely to have had a positive on the practice home-education. More specifically,

McAvoy highlighted the prospect of the internet offering more personalised opportunities for learners.

8.4.6   Avoiding an early exit

In one of the few family interviews that involved the participation of an entire family, Naomi described how a semi-structured approach was simply not working for her daughter Rebecca. Arguably, this could be, in part, due to the diffuse evaluation criteria associated with *invisible* forms of pedagogy (Bernstein 1975b). As Naomi demonstrated:

> Up until now, it has been really informal but we really had to make some changes…Rebecca was always good at maths but she found it hard because she couldn't measure herself against anyone. That was one of the failings of home-education I think, the fact that she didn't have anyone else to measure herself against. She likes that **(Naomi, home-educator).**

Subsequently, Naomi and her husband, both Christians, looked to the internet for alternatives. Having researched a few options, Naomi and her family decided to enrol Rebecca onto an online virtual correspondence course called *A Beka Academy*. *A Beka Academy* is an organisation based in the US which offers materials specifically to 'homeschoolers' to educate from 'a Christian perspective'.[31] Rebecca reflects on her experiences of participating in a virtual classroom:

> You start on a certain day. You decide what day you want to start and when you want to start and then they give you the lesson. It is like lesson one, lesson to the next day...You login and watch the lesson. It is pre-recorded. But, there is a teacher that teaches you. They give you a whole lesson and it ranges from half an hour to 40 minutes depending on what lessons, or how much you have to learn. There could be a quiz the next day so you would review a lot on that day. Then they give you homework…. I like the fact that the classes have the students in the room…You can see the clever ones and the people who are struggling more. It is really interesting to see the diversity; they also have a really high standard in the classroom. So it almost feels like you are part of it… **(Rebecca, home-educated teen).**

Derek, Rebecca's father commented on how this change had allowed him to give Rebecca more control over her education:

> [T]his video schooling has actually allowed Rebecca to take much more control over her education. So she knows she has to do all of the lessons on every subject that day. She just goes and plans which time of day she's going to do it. Sometimes I want to control it bit too much…. Every day I am supposed to check whether Rebecca has done her homework. But I don't check because I trust her and I know that she will do it…**(Derek, Naomi's husband**).

---

[31] See website for further details: https://www.abekaacademy.org/

Arguably, Naomi, Rebecca and Derek's comments allude to a process whereby the availability of new technologies met the challenges of unstructured home-education. Interestingly, Rebecca's comments reflect what could be a form of pedagogy that is weakly framed, yet strongly classified (Bernstein 1975b). This is an unusual finding and perhaps demonstrates fertile grounds for extending or developing Bernstein's work so that it reflects the changed learning contexts that the participation in virtual schools and online classrooms might suggest.

8.5 Nearing the end of our journey

In the findings from the qualitative survey responses of styles and methods influential to home-education, several parents recorded GCSEs and A-levels as forms of provision most influential to their home-education. Except for 5 of the 27 families interviewed who had children between 14-18 years of age, all were currently or had plans for their children to undertake GCSEs or A-levels with the view to applying for further education. For the other five families, their children had also devised non-traditional routes into higher or further education via distance learning courses and mass online multi-media platforms such as Coursera. This section of my discussion, explores the transition and effects of moving towards these forms of education. These experiences are told by home-educated young people, several of whom, had plans to attend college/sixth form within a few months, and a handful of which were planning to transition, or were already transitioned, into higher education. Based on these accounts, the analysis gives an interesting reflection through the eyes of both parents and learners as to what home-education has meant to them, and by inference what it has 'produced'.

8.5.1 Qualifications and resources

Towards the end of their journey, some families had made the decision to pursue formal qualifications. A lack of government funding compounded the anxieties that parents faced while searching for possible correspondence courses such as IGCSEs. Fiona showed,

> There is no government funding for home-education at all. So, everything we do is money out of our own pocket, which is fine, that is what we signed up for when we decided to home-educate. What you do the correspondence course is you purchase a course, the courses are anything between £400 and £800... **(Fiona, home-educator).**

Interestingly, Andrew, a home-educated teenager explained that finding the right subjects and receiving a good level of academic support was difficult to achieve form some of the home-education families he knew:

> [T]here are other families who don't want their children to go to school because they don't want them to be corrupted, but those parents don't necessarily teach their children everything that they will need to know... They do not teach them to a high enough standard

sometimes, in terms of understanding subjects, and getting them to the level they need to do qualifications… **(Andrew, home-educated teenager).**

Evidently, pooling resources mitigated the risk doing a poor job. Some parents had set up information pages, and collaborating online with other home-education parents was central to navigating through the daunting arena of exams. As Nadine illustrates:

> So, we set up a wiki for exams… we have an ever-growing reference work… I set up several collaborative documents with the other home-educators, it's crowdsourcing and I love it…**Nadine (home-educator).**

Moreover, some parents such as Sharon had created online groups for local home-education families in her area. Having recruited families online, Sharon pooled resources with several other parents to teach several home-educated children GCSE English. As she explained:

> I set up the Yahoo! group originally so that I could gauge interest really. It just seems to have grown from there… Myself and the other mums take care of different parts of the group…I mainly organise the external exam centre and another mum, who was also a teacher, tutors them on a weekly basis… **(Sharon, OM).**

8.6 On pedagogy from: invisible to visible

The research findings detailed below highlight how for families nearing or at the end of their home-education journey the feature of new technologies and online networks supports the implied and common transition from more invisible forms of pedagogy towards more visible forms (Bernstein 1975b). For young people (based on the survey data of the ages and forms of provision) over 65% percent over the ages of 16 were reported to be receiving 'mixed' and or 'state-school provision,' rather than home-education.

At the same time, however, the transition towards more visible forms of pedagogy was not always a straightforward, or even positive, experience for learners. For example, Stephanie recalls accidentally self-teaching herself the incorrect syllabus for a Maths GCSE:

> Freedom is a gift and a bit of a curse, because you can just end up not doing stuff for a very long time... My mum is starting a new career and she was really busy, so I've had to teach a lot of my GCSEs to myself, which is really quite difficult. I've had to read books, write down everything that I know about it, looking at questions on the internet and reading past papers...all from scratch...the problem was that I ended up learning the wrong tier for my Maths, so I had to revise it all again… **(Stephanie home ed. young person).**

Moreover, Andrew articulated that at 16 years old, he felt that he had 'missed the boat' with regards to sitting GCSEs exams. At 14, he recalled 'not doing well':

> I was supposed to be doing GCSEs, although I am a bit late for them. Most of the people my age finished them by now. I did three GCSEs from the ages of 11 to 13. I didn't do very

well....Now I'd like to do an ancient history course on Coursera… **(Andrew, home-educated teenager).**

Interestingly Dylan, one of the home-educated young people interviewed at Summerfest, explained that as the child of single parent household, his mother could not afford to pay for GCSEs. Wanting to attending college, but without any formal qualifications, Dylan made use of a free Massively Open Online Course hosted on a platform called Coursera. Having completed the course and gained a certificate, Dylan used this to apply for an ICT course at a local college:

> The internet is a massive tool; the amount of free resources you can get was helpful... I also managed to get into college doing ICT without having to any GCSEs...I finished a computer science course this year through Harvard University, it's the same course that they were offering their first-year university students but it was free… With the course, itself, you login and there are lectures, with it being computer stuff you also get problem sets every week, you complete those and it goes on a database**… (Dylan, home-educated young person).**

Furthermore, Dylan described enjoying participating in the course:

> It was really good. I ended up getting a little bit cocky and leaving some of the work until the end, so there was a bit of a mad rush at the end. I did the first couple of weeks and I thought, "oh if this is what the first year of university is like then it's easy" and then obviously gets harder. But I completed it, got a certificate and that was a big part of me being able to get into college… **(Dylan, home-educated young person).**

Although I do not know all the details regarding in Dylan's application to college, here access to new technologies facilitated the acquisition of a credential. This contributed to Dylan gaining place at college; somethingthat otherwise could have been considerably more difficult.. This further resonates with McAvoy's (2015) notion of a new democratised experience of education for home-education learners. At the same time, however, this ultimately rests on the rhetoric of access, an area within which the democratising potential of MOOCs for example, has not yet been fully realised (Selwyn 2016).

Furthermore, several of the home-educated adults that I spoke particularly at Summerfest had siblings who were attending university and/or they themselves had explicit plans to do so too. For example, Nicky's son remarks:

> I am going to go to Oxford in September to study math hopefully, but otherwise Kings if I don't get in… **(Nikki's son, home-educated young person).**

For Nikki's son, one could argue that his home-education journey had come to end, as he was now on his way to university. However, the fact his siblings were still home-educated suggests that for the family their journey is not finished.

These findings support my earlier propositions of a common pathway towards more visible forms of pedagogy (Bernstein 1975b). The desire to journey to an alternative destination in home-education is one that is slightly at odds with journeying back towards more visible forms of pedagogy. Interestingly, in the next section I will discuss how the notion of 'better and different' (Pattison 2015) is reflected in the accounts of what is a common pathway shared by parents and educators.

8.7 Strengthened identities

In this final section, I will concentrate on how the common pathway forged by parents and learners leads to a strengthened sense of self in both parents and learners. Moreover, the values and qualities articulated in the shared enterprise of home-education (see Section 5.3) point towards a successful transmission of social values (Bernstein 1975). Interestingly, this is a relational transformation, in that the learners (*acquirers*) that make sense of themselves and their experiences in a vacuum. Rather, I show that this process is equally as transformative to parents (*transmitters*), who themselves have constituted their identities in a wider social learning system of networks and communities.

8.7.1 Reflections from the home-educating parent

Towards the end of their home-education journey parents described how, through their experiences, they had become more reflective and philosophical through their participation in the landscape. For example, Elaine demonstrated:

> I think now, I would class myself far more as a philosophical home-educator because I have seen the benefits of not being in the mainstream school setting. But my initial reaction, was the knee-jerk, this is a crisis reaction **(Elaine, OM).**

Notably, based on her accounts discussed in Section 7.2.1 one could have classified Elaine as a 'last resort home-educator' using Morton's (2011) schema. Yet based on her reflections in home-education, arguably she could be more of a 'natural choice' home-educator instead (Morton 2011). Thus, for parents like Elaine, who had initially been weakly committed to the wider project of home-education, arriving at gateway 'reactively' signalled the reframing of their very reasons for home-education (Bernstein 1975a).

Moreover, Esther (previously a teacher) remarked that home-education had transformed her into a more politically aware being:

> I think it has been quite life changing. I used to be much more normal. You know I thought about my career and all of that kind of stuff. I used to go on holiday drink beer and lie on the beach and now we go on holiday and I ask 'what can we find out here?'... So, that approach to life is very different. I've become much more questioning of all sorts of things,

so now I'm massively politically active, campaigning all of that kinds of thing, I campaign on all sorts of health issues, education issues, environmental issues, climate change, genetically modified organisms… **(Esther home-educator).**

Thus, parents like Esther, are subsequently more comfortable in assuming a non-normative parental identity. This finding further supports what others such as Safran (2008) found to be the transformative nature of home-education. It demonstrates that as home-educators make sense of their experiences, in doing so negotiate their identity. As parents participate in the landscape (both online and offline) and watch their children grow, they identify more strongly with the values of freedom and growth. What this suggests, is that new technologies play a facilitative role enabling the transformation towards a redefined sense of the parental self.

In relation to the discussions in *Chapter six*, the reasons for home-education are not static, and they develop the longer a family has been home-educating. The reasons for home-education are multi-dimensional and inherently interconnected. Not one family cited a single reason alone for why they decided to home-educate, at the time, compared with why they do now. In some respects, the pre-emptive and reactive typology should be viewed as a continuum. As the identities and commitment of parents evolve across time, so do the reasons for home-education. They are thus continuing and evolving across the number of years in home-education.

8.7.2 Home-educated young people: I am free

Across the several interviews, home-educated young people reiterated that their experience had cultivated a vital skillset that was perceived to be absent in school (i.e. soft skills and the ability to think critically). Being an independent thinker, who is an individual facilitated by the ability for young people to set up their own networks and to cultivate their 'own' interests, which is particularly pertinent towards the latter stages of home-education.

> You also get to find yourself. [I]n school you will be peer pressured into liking music that other people like…. if I had gone to school I would have been regarded as a classical music nerd, I am allowed to be my own person and that's brilliant….it is a strange feeling to be leaving home-education..**(Stephanie, a home-educated teen).**

> I am free thinking. You don't necessarily need GCSEs to be successful. If you are really imaginative you can do things… **(Tristan, a home-educated young person).**

> I think for me the main thing is, that because I got to choose what I learned about, I don't have an aversion to education because I think it's all boring. Whereas at school you are forced to do subjects you don't like, with teachers you don't get on with, for many hours a day... It's much better I think, having the opportunity to learn yourself. I actually like the stuff I do and I'm excited to start college... **(Billie, a home-educated young person).**

At the same time, however, these learners also developed a strong sense of the 'other', namely being different from their schooled peers. For instance:

> It means that I have always felt comfortable in public situations. I haven't grown up just with adults in the position of authority. So I feel that I know how to talk to them… **(Nicky's eldest son, a home-educated young person)**

> You get to be your own person. That is one of the main things that I love about it. There are some things that maybe I would have got ostracised for it school, but because I am in this sort of atmosphere I haven't… **(Billie, a home-educated young person).**

> I've got a very solid backing in knowing what I want to do with my life... You get a very strong sense of self… **(Cole, a home-educated young person).**

> I think I have become a better person for being home-educated than I would have been had I gone to school…. I have a more rounded view of the world. It's just a good viewpoint... **(Stephanie, a home-educated young person).**

For these reasons, it is important to caution against the assumption that practise of home-education has a clear beginning, middle and end, because for many of my families it did not. As home-educated learners attend college and university, they are no longer positioned at the centre of home-education communities. However, evidently their experience of participating in the landscape of practice is pivotal in how they imagine themselves in later life. They often continue to define themselves and what they aim to achieve in the future by their experiences of home-education, despite no longer playing an active role in those communities. This echoes Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner's (2015) account of how individuals are shaped by their experiences journeying through the landscape (see *Chapter four*).

However, the beliefs and values that these learners had come assume arguably mirrors the ideologies of the communities and groups within which these young people had participated in. Interesting, Cole advocated that everyone could be home-educated in their own communities:

> If everyone in the whole country was home-educated it would not really be a problem because then everyone would have their own communities so socialising wouldn't be a problem, it would be the norm so there would be no negative stereotypes... **(Cole, a home-educated young person).**

The difficulty here is that, if parents self-select or channel their children into like-minded social networks as they grow up, the extent to which they have truly been freed through their experience of being immersed in communities is questionable. I discuss this tension further in the next chapter (*Chapter nine*).

8.8 Summary

In conclusion, the findings presented in this chapter have described the ways in which the knowledgeability acquired through participation in the landscape facilitates different points in the pedagogic life of home-education. New technologies allow home-educators to cater for learner

interests in a way that would have been previously difficult to do. This, in turn, suggests that different families can personalise and tailor make education that might be more efficient and suitable to the needs of different learners. Socialising with home-education groups provides vital emotional support to home-educators, which supports the successful acquisition of a non-normative parental identity. This facilitates the transition from visible to more invisible pedagogic styles in the early stages of home-education. Participating in neighbourhood groups also provides a secondary site of acquisition which helps parents to assess the development of their child and to provide them with the kinds of social and educational enrichment opportunities which would have been difficult to do without the planning and involvement of other home-education families. Rather than a socially isolated practice, home-education practices are instead embedded within networks and communities.

Furthermore, new technologies extend the learning opportunities and allow home-educators to further exercise surveillance. For these reasons, the weak classification and framing evident in the distinct pedagogic styles of 'unstructured' and 'semi-structured' styles of home-education do not necessarily equate to a freer education. Despite the rhetoric, power and control are still evident in the relations between the home-educators and home-educated learner. The findings have also shown how participation in neighbourhood groups enables parents to share their cultural capital to deliver classes to support the provision of formal qualifications at the later stages of home-education. This represented a transition from invisible to more visible forms of pedagogy. The subsequent 'outbound' home-education identities of parents and learners reflected the values and goals of the shared projected of home-education. However, these messages, shaped by the *field of production,* are eventually transmitted to home-educated learners who in turn reproduce these accounts. This therefore suggests that the accounts of home-educated learners mirror the self-selecting structures of the communities within which they were generated. This in turns surfaces the tension regarding the extent which the content of these messages (that home-educated learners are free thinking individuals) with the views that can be excluded in these groups (discussed in *Chapter six*).

Chapter 9 : Discussion and conclusion

9.1   Introduction

This thesis has depicted a group of families who conceptualised and practised education in a different way than most. In the pursuit of an alternative, this research has shown how new technologies facilitate, challenge and sustain home-education. In telling this narrative, I have shed light on an under researched area of home-education; a topic of research marked by partisanship. The purpose of this chapter is to examine whether the findings indicate a reconfiguration of home-education. First, I revisit my research aims and discuss the findings with reference to previous home-education research. Specifically, I reflect on the paradoxes of: i) division and unity; ii) sameness and difference and iii) freedom and surveillance. Drawing on key pieces of literature, I identify the how this study has tried to answer calls for a different kind of research in home-education. I also reflect on the methodological tools and analytical strategy used to achieve this. The remainder of this chapter comments on the wider implications of this study for the field of digital education. Finally, areas of study that would benefit from further research are recommended. I close this thesis with a note on why researching alternative forms of provision is important for the future innovativeness of our educational systems.

9.2   Revisiting the research aims

To begin this concluding chapter, I revisit the areas of inquiry that this thesis sought to answer and they ways in which it differed from other studies on the topic. The overarching aim of this thesis was to explore the role of new technologies among home-educating families. Subsidiary to this was to consider the ways in which the appropriation of new technologies might have changed what home-education is and how it is achieved. This inquiry was guided by three central questions. In the following discussion, I summarise how these questions have been answered.

> 1. **How have different home-education groups organised themselves through the appropriation of new technologies and in what ways does this affect the construction of home-education knowledge online?**

Chapter five was dedicated to making sense of the different kinds of groups, communities and networks that were represented in my sample. To do this, I concentrated on the characteristics that served to differentiate and unite home-educators from one another.

Most apparent, was the geographically dispersed nature of this population. This finding supported previous trends identified in Rothermel (2002) Fortune-Wood's (2005) work. Furthermore, it was

found that families drew upon a diverse collection of educational philosophies, styles and methods to support the practice of home-education. Coupled with unique familial situations, experiences and beliefs, it was argued that home-educators and their children possessed unique needs and interests. In this way, my findings supported the argument that it is not particularly helpful to classify home-educators in a dichotomous way, because their experiences and beliefs were likely to change across the number of years spent in home-education (Fortune-Wood 2005). This assertion was further evidenced in *Chapter eight*.

It was also shown that some families possessed similar repertoires, norms and shared histories in the landscape of practice. Importantly, I demonstrated that some clusters or collections of families *identify* more explicitly with some regions in the landscape than others. This supported Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2015) notion of *multi-membership* in a nexus of many communities and networks. More broadly, based on their social positions and values, it was argued that the home-educators in this research might constitute a unique *middle class fraction* (Ball 2002; 2006). While this research found the occupational social class levels of home-educators to be higher than Rothermel (2002) found, the differences might reflect a broader digital divide in internet use rather than evidencing a change in the social characteristics of families who home-educate (an issue explored further in Section 9.3.1).

Furthermore, the shared values between parents were connected to social rather than academic educational outcomes, in some ways resembling Beck's (2010) previous work. In this way, I effectively set the scene for understanding why and how families and communities have come to organise themselves using online technologies.

The findings from *Chapter five* showed that existing communities have acquired additional spaces of communication, and parents have created new communities and extended old ones using Yahoo! and Facebook. The personal social networks of families are therefore likely to be larger than before. Moreover, I also showed that a variety of new technologies were used in home-education, many of which might support different kinds of networks and community.

Over time more experienced members of home-education have come to manage and regulate the boundaries between different groups with vetting procedures and rules and regulations. In this way, the intended practices of parents were effectively translated onto the online domain; parents no longer must have to join a group and find home-educators offline because they are easily visible online. In some ways, this points towards the notion that home-educators are no longer an invisible or hidden community and are readily discovered and are identifiable to one another. I also explain that over time the participation of experienced members has given rise to new structures. This

demonstrates that home-education is something that has progressed over time and given rise to differential social relations. These groups were clearly characterised by *reciprocity*, and accountability to the *enterprise* of home-education (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). In adapting to the perceived or actual risk of home-education, parents have adopted what could regarded as a protective strategy to mitigate against the perceived and or actual experiences of life (Ball 2002).

I also demonstrated that online moderators act as gatekeepers- working in between different domains of home-education practice. I argued that this process of organisation points towards some groups that are likely to support more highly differentiated populations, while others supporting more stratified communities. Coupled with the diverse use of technologies in home-education, I showed that home-education as a social practice can be viewed as a learning system within which there are multiple collections and networks connected to it. This permits the view that home-educating families and their communities as mutually constitutive of broader *a landscape of social practice* (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner 2015).

The second part of my first question: "*in what ways does this affect the construction of home-education knowledge online?"* was addressed in *Chapter six*. Here I used the *Badman Review* as a case study to explore how the mechanisms of organisation affect the construction of home-education knowledge online. I was particularly interested in how the information and exchanges shared between members who participated in the group was implicitly or explicitly shaped or reformed through the appropriation of Yahoo! and Facebook. Importantly, what I found was that home-educators organised themselves as a broader but perhaps weak advocacy network in the fight against the recommendations of the *Badman Review*. Central to this was the engagement and mobilisation of a large group of home-educators. In organising this coalition, home-educators successfully acquired political representation. In this way, particularly autonomous home-educators challenged what they felt was a disenfranchisement in the discussion of alternatives styles and approaches in the *Badman Review* and subsequent media portrayals of home-educating families. Moreover, home-educators felt connected to a strong and intelligent political counter-movement. It encouraged political activism in parents who otherwise had never campaigned before, and was generally viewed positively as home-educators represent a group who felt a strong sense of alienation and vulnerability.

However, it was shown that amidst these positive achievements, the presence of social networking amplified existing tensions within a community of communities. In their bid to foster unity and coherence, home-educators unintentionally fostered bonding capital at the expense of bridging

capital, and thus niche or minority views were overrepresented. The silencing of oppositional views to some extent served to divide and insulate some home-educators from one another. I also showed that fear and vulnerability experienced at the time of Badman (2009) had a lingering influence, exacerbating the philosophical tensions between structured and autonomous parents.

Subsequently, it was argued that the knowledge available to new and existing members in some online groups is not neutral or representative of the diversity advocates strove and continue to fight for. Moreover, it also pointed towards the possibility of a self-selecting groupthink beginning to settle in. Paradoxically, in the actions that symbolically sought to challenge the dominant order of education as synonymous with school, home educators further divided themselves. This was reflected in the exclusionary interactions between home-educators themselves. Crucially, this has implications for the kinds of innovativeness of future practice, and more broadly, home-educators seeking a wide and strong community cohesion. Ultimately this contradicted the values of freedom and recognition that advocates sought to achieve.

This suggested that the communities identified by Safran (2008; 2009) may have changed through the acquisition of new social structures Crucially, some of the existing neighbourhood groups are likely to support much larger populations than was previously possible. Moreover, I also explained that home-educators are likely to be members of multiple groups both online and offline at any one given point and that this membership is likely to change as their practice develops. Home-education is still largely a gendered practice and thus the burden often falls on the mother. In this way, I therefore described the ways in which different groups have organised themselves through the appropriation of new technologies

2. What is the place of online networks and communities in the discovery of home-education and how is this significant for families at the point of entry?

My second research question was answered in *Chapter seven-* where I described how parents learnt to become home-educators. It was shown that socialising with home-educators and their families (both online and offline) was important for new families. This enabled unconfident parents to *imagine* home-education as a positive alternative to school. In doing so, differentiated between two forms of decision-making at the point of entry. Pre-emptive decision-making signalled positive transitions into home-education, while reactive was more negative.

One of the key findings in this chapter was that pre-emptive families made the decision to home-educate much earlier due to networking with other parents in home-education. Crucially, I used CoP and LoP theory to explain how, through *imagination*, parents could see themselves as home-

educators. Moreover, for pre-emptive parents, they had a sense that home-education was something inherently positive; a pursuit that would offer a possibility towards cultivating independent and free-thinking learners. In contrast, however, when parents arrived at the gateway of home-education reactively, often their experiences and knowledge of home-education were imbued in misconceptions and unknowns. For these parents, online groups acted as a first point of contact with other home-educating families. Often they have arrived at this point in a state of crisis, their children having had a negative experience of school. For these parents, 'lurking', a form of peripheral participation, served to normalise their perception of home-education as something achievable. Moreover, the support meant that they were offered reassurance from an established community. This signalled a realignment towards an alternative.

Through their participation in both online and offline networks in home-education communities, parents acquired a sense of belonging and reassurance that gave them the confidence to take a leap into the unknown. Furthermore, online networks were shown to provide informational support in the form of deregistration letters. Arguably these findings point towards the democratisation of home-education in some ways, but not others. The increased visibility of home-education practise online might counteract negative media representation and perceptions of home-education. Access to a ready-made network of families might be, as Beck (2010) found, the difference between parents deciding to home-educate or not. The increased visibility of specialist domains of home-education practise, for example, groups for families with special educational needs, have specialist resources and access to tailored forms of support that is lost when deregistering a child from school e.g. disability related assessments.

Furthermore, it was argued that home-education might have become more accessible than it was before the proliferation of online groups in home-education. However, in this chapter I also alluded to the paradox of access. When considering the polarisation of knowledge enabled through the self-organising mechanisms afforded to groups in the landscape, boundaries in the form of rules and regulations mean some groups are quick to determine real from 'fake' home-educators. This in part was a reaction to the vulnerabilities and fears triggered in the Badman (2009) era, and has continued to permeate how home-educators treat members at the boundary of their practice as showed in *Chapter six*. As a direct consequence of this, the extent to which home-education has truly been democratised through the availability of new technologies such as Yahoo! and Facebook is questionable. This further substantiated earlier points that, due to *boundary practices*, home-educators may be able to harness strong levels of bonding capital at the expense of bridging capital. Paradoxically during politically uncertain times, marginalised groups need to exert a common coherence, strength and solidarity with each other. To some extent it could be argued that the role

of new technologies could thwart the innovativeness of some of the learning communities and networks in home-education. This in turn strengthened the transmission and reproduction of values held by a middle-class faction (Ball 2006). At the same time, however, the use of new technologies altered and transformed the landscape (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

3. **How and in what ways do online networks facilitate pedagogical practices and identities and what are the consequences of this for the function of home-education?**

In *Chapter eight*, I argued that home-educators alike forge a common pathway across their journey in the landscape. More specifically I considered how this subsequently facilitated the pedagogic life in home-education. I therefore answered my third research question by outlining the different challenges and barriers towards achieving the *shared enterprise* of home-education. At the start of their journey parents faced negative reactions which translated into alienation and further anxiety. This contributed to a compounded sense of loneliness and uncertainty. Often, during this time, parents felt the need to emulate school since this was the predominant frame of reference in their experience of education. I demonstrated that through participating in online networks and offline communities in home-education parents learnt what an education without school might look like. Many parents had never heard of child-led and autonomous approaches before. Crucially, the knowledge acquired in the landscape enabled the transition towards more invisible forms of pedagogy Bernstein (1975). This was evidenced in a period adopted by reactive families called "de-schooling" during which time the learner was granted greater control over when and what they learned.

However, this research found that maintaining visible pedagogies was an emotional and time-consuming endeavour. I've shown that at times parents faced periods of renewed doubt and uncertainty as to whether this was the 'right' choice for their family. This was compounded by the fact that visible pedagogies are inherently diffuse, and thus difficult to measurably evaluate. In other words, with the absence of formal testing levels and curriculum, it was difficult for parents to determine their child's educational and social development. As parents participate in the landscape, some come to misidentify with the *local practices* they have previously been engaged in. In this way, this research found that memberships and *allegiances* in the landscape are fluid and changeable over time. Moreover, for parents who had come to dis-identify with certain groups, several proceeded to create new ones. Arguably the creation of a like-minded network of families enabled offline groups to function as secondary sites of acquisition.

One of the important findings in *Chapter eight* was that, despite the rhetoric, autonomous and informal approaches are not necessarily devoid of surveillance and control. Crucially, parents adopt a more tacit awareness of their child's behaviour. Through observing their child play, parents exercised implicit surveillance; whereby the child must be seen to be 'busy doing things'. In this way, the child exteriorises themselves, but can never truly be aware of this. Arguably this placed into question Safran's (2012) implicit assumption that home-educators offer their children more trust, and by association freedom, through their pedagogic styles. Another important finding was that new technologies such as YouTube, Khan academy and other educational software functioned to provide a more personalised and tailored education for learners. This broadly supports McAvoy's (2015) assertion that new technologies offer more personalised learning contexts for home-educated learners. Moreover, this was also evidenced in the accounts of learners using MOOCs.

Towards the end of their journey both learners and parents faced a further set of unique challenges: the cost of obtaining qualifications and resources. In response to these challenges parents used new technologies to organise parent led study groups, sharing informational resources to give children classes to supplement the families' pursuit towards measured achievement. I have demonstrated how participation in a landscape of practice shaped the *modes of belonging* and identities of home-educators and home-educated learners in different ways (Wenger 1998). Crucially, the acquisition of knowledge across online and offline contexts was essential for the relative success of this journey. For home-educators *engagement* and *imagination* in the landscape strengthened *competence* in, and *commitment* to, local *regimes of practice* (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015). Ultimately this served to strengthen the transmission and reproduction of social values.

9.3   Has home-education changed?

The pathways travelled while undertaking this doctorate have led to me believe that the answer to this question is complex. Broadly speaking, the landscape of practice has *shaped* and been *shaped* by the appropriation of new technologies. Fundamentally, the 'new' tools that communities and networks in home-education have appropriate have altered their practice in some ways but not in others. Therefore, the conclusions of this study are not a set of hard-hitting statements or recommendations, but instead unearthed a series of tensions, challenges and unanswered questions. In the following sections I address explore some of these issues further and consider their implications for what the practice of home-education intends to achieve.

9.3.1 Reconfigured communities

The findings of this study echoed Stevens (2001) observations that home educators are not a random collection of individuals, but "an elaborate social movement with celebrities, networks and characteristic lifeways" (p.33). However, this study has moved beyond identifying and modelling home-education groups in the ways that Safran (2008) and Steven's (2001) did. Instead, it has provided a comprehensive explanation of how home-education groups co-construct and share knowledge across both online and offline spaces and the ways in which this knowledge simultaneously supported and challenged their home-education practice.

The focus on a social learning systems, as opposed to singular communities emphasised the importance of *boundaries* in a landscape of practice. Moreover, my application of Bernstein's (1975a) notion of *classification* and *frame* uncovered the ways in which power and control might operate in a landscape of practice. In this way, this study found home-education practice to be an inherently contested field of symbolic struggle. As communities and networks seek to colonise regions in the landscape, they break away, merge and split from one and another.

This research further supports the notion that home-education is practice is transformative for parents, learners and families (Lees 2013; Safran 2008). This work supports previous work demonstrating that that in undertaking home-education, parents become more politically engaged. However, I would extend this argument to suggested that the views political views and ideologies acquired home-educators mirror the ideas and perspectives permitted in the communities and networks within they participate in. Moreover, if home-educators ultimately come to see themselves as *cognitive dissonants* (Norris 2004), it is paradoxical that *dissident* views in some home-education circles are silenced. This something that members of home-education groups need to reflect upon.

9.3.2 Liberated learners?

This study has challenged the generalised assertion that some of the pedagogic styles used in home-education offer home-educated learners a greater degree of freedom in comparison to their schooled counterparts. In *Chapter two* it was shown that advocates of 'unschooling' and 'autonomous education' argue that these approaches serve to liberate the learner from the systems of power and control observed in schools. However, this research has shown that these pedagogic styles are not devoid of power and surveillance altogether (see *Chapter eight*). This aspect of my findings suggests that *autonomous* styles of education, for example, are not necessarily freer, and by implication better, than the more visible forms of pedagogy (observed in Primary and Secondary schools for instance). Rather, both formal and more informal styles of education socialise learners into learners into social structures - albeit via different mechanisms.

Thus, rather than a 'desperately dangerous notion' (Rothermel 2015), the findings of this research have suggested that home-education can be viewed as an extension of a parenting culture that seeks to manage and protect learners from the external risks and broken promises of public school systems (Vincent and Maxwell 2016). The findings of this study also suggested that home-education serves to cultivate the soft-skills perceived to be absent in schools. However, the extent to which this later serves to help or hinder the acquisition of hard skills in the form of qualifications is unclear. In *Chapter nine* for example, it was evident that gaining the economic resources to sit GCSES as independent candidate, for example, was a challenge for some home-educating families. The creation and use of co-operative groups offline designed to support home-educated learners in sitting GCSES examinations for example is undoubtedly a good thing. However, degree to which a multitude of subjects and types of formal qualifications that are truly accessible to home-educated learners is not known and would therefore benefit from further research.

9.3.3 An exclusive educational alternative?

As I first set out in *Chapter seven*, on the one hand new technologies democratised home-education in terms of increasing its visibility and for generating message that symbolically challenge a wider culture of misrecognition (Fraser 1995). However, the extent to which the shared enterprise of home-education is truly available to all groups in society is unclear. It could be the case that middle-class families with high levels of cultural and social capital they are the ones able to fully exploit the possibilities of new technologies and participate in the LoP. This increases the likelihood of developing areas of *competency* and the mastery of home-education. However, for those without access to new regions of the landscape, might be implicitly excluded from becoming masters of their own practice. In other words, these families might therefore exit home-education before being able to realise accountability and commitment to shared enterprise of home-education. New technologies may have therefore strengthened the transmission of middle-class values. Evidently, the existence and effects of a digital divide in home-education requires further exploration.

The findings of this study resurface a tension that has been highlighted by others regarding whether the growth of home-education in society epitomises the rejection and re-establishment of *community* amid its loss in wider society (Apple 2002; Pietrie 1992). In cases where home-educated learners participated in groups that were *highly stratified* (organised primarily based on fixed attributes such as religious beliefs for example), I would extend this argument to suggest that home-education neighbourhood groups could be viewed as highly privatised school-like institutions. To some degree, this thesis tentatively suggests that home-education to some extent might signal a returned to modern forms of education- characterised by individualism (Apple 2002).

More broadly, the breaking and making of social institutions (facilitated with new technologies) perhaps surfaces a deeper paradox for the progressive education movement. Arguably, some of the home-education groups represented in this study could be viewed as the modern representatives of this project- in that they identified with, and sought to deliver, the pedagogic messages advocated by figureheads such as Steiner and Holt, as examples. However, if the practices of these representatives are unintentionally contributing to the reproduction of social closure, then to what extent are we truly moving towards the democratisation of learning an education in society. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide definitive answers to this question. However, what can be suggested is that the mechanisms used to by movements to create and deliver social action are just as important for the ideas that they intend to communicate.

9.4   Reflections on method and conceptual toolkit

This study has tried to respond to calls for a more impartial and rigorous methodological approach in the topic. To achieve this, quantitative and qualitative data tools were used as part of a mixed-method research design. This included an online survey as well semi-structured interviews with parents, children and young people in several different settings conducted in groups and one-to-one. The data set I obtained comprised of: i) 242 survey responses ii) 52 interviews (outlined in Section 3.8). In this way, I have answered Kunzman and Gaither's (2003) call for more numerical data on the topic.

The discussions in *Chapters three* and *four* also highlighted the strengths and limitations of the research approach and analytical strategy used in this study. For instance, it was argued that due to the sampling techniques, the findings of this research do not represent the wider population of home-educating families (some of whom might not have access to the internet). Subsequently, I accessed a more diverse range of families in terms of geographical location in comparison to other doctoral studies and small scale studies in the field. However, I would argue that the relational process and emerging structures described in *Chapter five* could be representative of the parents who regularly participate in online Yahoo and Facebook groups intended to support home-education.

Additionally, I also highlighted the practical difficulties regarding parents as gatekeepers during the interviews and described some of the steps taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of my participants. The use of group interviews with parents, children and young people yielded mixed success. While the method of family interviewing was productive in some cases, they were difficult to manage. On reflection, I would have liked greater participation from children and young people in this study. Future work could utilise the offline groups and community spaces used by home

educators to conduct informal focus groups with home-educated learners. Such techniques, could make use of visual diary entries in the way that Nelson (2014) did in here doctoral research. More broadly, researchers should continue to seek the participation of home-educated children and young people in their work wherever possible. Evidently, as other researchers have found, gaining access and acquiring the trust of home-educating families is complex and necessitates a great deal of sensitivity. However, in *Chapter three* it was shown that the positionality of the researcher required a considerable degree of reflexivity. In this study, it was acknowledged that the researcher sometimes implicitly strayed towards a more sympathetic reading of the field. On reflection, this perhaps echoes the challenge of voicing the dynamic and conflicting views of a minority group in an empowering manner, while remaining critical and objective.

Furthermore, a comprehensive conceptual toolkit was developed to enhance and extend the explanatory power of the findings. The ideas and language used to interpret my mixed-method data utilised aspects of the CoP model and LoP framework (Wenger, 1998; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger Trayner 2015); Bernsteinian ideas (1975a; 1975b; 2000) and formulations of social capital theory (Bourdieu 1969; Putnam 2000) (see *Chapter four*). The use of this framework was of value to this thesis in several important areas. Firstly, Bernsteinian concepts helped to explain the collective processes involved in the generation of knowledge and the ways in which this knowledge was selected and re-appropriated in the pedagogical practices outside of the formal institution of school. Central to this analysis was the importance of power and surveillance. This supported the aim to produce a more critical reading of home-education, one that moved away from the problematic dichotomy of home-education as both better and different than school (Pattison 2015).

Additionally, the application of 'push' and 'pull factors' in addition to theories of capital enabled the researcher to move beyond the limited conceptualisations of home-educated families in previous work. Through reactive and pre-emptive decision-making, I surfaced a continuum that recognised the differential positions and resources among home-educating families.

The use of CoP theory served to showcase the importance of learning, identity and belonging among home-educating families. These components were of central importance to the relative success in family's journey to an alternative destination in education. In doing so, this thesis extended knowledge on the ways in which home-education is a socially constructed practice. Moreover, the LoP framework served to develop theoretical understanding of the kinds of communities and networks thought to exist in home-education. Firstly, it showed that make-up of networks and communities intended to support home-education is inherently diverse, comprised of a multitude of online and offline domains. This in turn demonstrated that the networks and

communities in home education are continuously transforming and being transformed by the members who constitute them. Some communities in home-education are transient, while others splinter and or/merge and grow. In this way, the work has moved beyond a reading of single communities in home-education (see Safran 2008), towards one that reflects the temporal and dynamic nature of home-education itself. Additionally, the work also surfaced the ways in which the landscape can be transformative to the sense of solidarity and belonging within minority groups.

The use of CoP theory was useful in highlighting the importance of social learning and meaning-making among families. In this way, the analysis provided an account of networks and communities in home education learning from one and another. This approach positioned both parents and children and learners as jointly involved in learning process. This moved away from more visible pedagogic relationships between 'the educator' and 'the learner' commonly observed in formal institutions.

9.5   Theoretical contributions

This work has answered calls to move beyond identifying single communities practice towards an analysis of social learning systems. The LoP model is an emergent model that will no doubt be subject to development in future. For researchers utilising this perspective in future, this research has demonstrated that aspects of Bernstein's code theory (1975a; 1975b) can be used to extend an analysis of power and surveillance and the effect of this upon different regions in the landscape. Specifically, in this research the concepts of *classification* and *framing* were productive in understanding the nature of boundary making, peripheral participation and its effect on identification/dis-identification among competing regimes of competence within social learning systems (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

More broadly, this study has also demonstrated that Bernstein's (1975a) code theory is useful for the analysis of social organisations and curricula used by groups who practice education beyond the institution of a school. Notably from a practice-based perspective, pedagogic relationships are created and sustained in a variety of different environments and social contexts across the life course. This therefore shows that Bernstein's (1975a) ideas could be applied to an analysis of other important institutions and social organisations in society.

An unusual finding reported in *Chapter 9*, illustrated that, with the presence of a virtual schooling, Bernstein's distinction between 'invisible' and 'visible' pedagogy was blurred. The instance of a strongly *classified* by weakly *framed* form of pedagogic types might indicate the need to extend or develop this framework through further research.

9.6 Implications for digital education

As the title suggests, in this research new technologies played a ubiquitous and important component in the creation and engagement in different communities and networks in home-education. In this research the term 'new technology' encompassed many different online media and learning platforms. However, the analysis predominantly focused on the social media platforms of Yahoo! and Facebook groups. In this research, technology functioned as a central component to promoting solidarity in home-education on the one-hand, and what Apple (2002) might view as disintegration on the other. However, the extent to which these technologies facilitate social change that is 'new' is an interesting juxtaposition. Through the strengthened transmission of social and cultural capital among 'middle class families', this research arguably demonstrated a wider process whereby the 'old social structures' offline were broken down and simultaneously rebuilt through the 'new' tools utilised by home-educating communities. Thus, the extent to which new technologies serve to promote social progress for minority groups in education is an inherently 'grey' area of observation. The following discussion considers these arguments and their implications for broader research in the field of 'digital' education.

> Digital technologies hold the potential to engage us more closely in meaningful communal connections… in as much as they might take us away from embodied local interactions, they could threaten to damage the real thing (Baym 2010, pp.73).

Digital technology is a trendy topic in the contemporary educational landscape. Much has been promised about how the increased availability of these tools will serve to democratise society. Through disrupting, upgrading or ending classical education systems and practices, it follows that otherwise excluded groups will be equipped with the kinds of skills and capabilities to participate in the knowledge.

When considering the democratising effects of technology in education, previous writers have tended to reinforce the unhelpful dichotomy of dystopian futures with utopian possibilities (Selwyn 2016). On the one hand, adoption of new technologies is positioned as the means to improve education by capturing and improving the motivations of learners who use them. Online courses and other technologies are said to create more authentic and situated pedagogic relations and ubiquitous forms of learning (Pateman 2011). This includes expanding the capacity of teachers to teach. In this way, digital technologies are promoted as being transformative to 'old' ways of teaching and learning in education. A bolder claim is that the access and use of digital technologies in education will one day sweep away the bureaucratic and self-serving educational institutions. Crucially, the extensive use and access to high quality sources and resources online will make these institutions irrelevant- leading to the revolutionised landscape of educational provision.

In the field of digital education, *access* to the internet is often assumed to have democratised learning in education, and continues to do so (Selwyn 2016). However, this research has shown that this *rhetoric* of access is much more complex. For example, in some cases you need more than an internet connection and an email account to join and participate in an online community intended to support home-education practice. The simple 'click and enter' assertion made by Norris (2004, p.33) overlooks the subtle rules, rituals and norms required to therefore *access* and exchange knowledge in some online spaces.

> [I]t exceptionally easy to find the niche website or specific discussion group that reflects one's particular beliefs and interests, avoiding exposure to alternative points of view… To avoid cognitive dissonance, it is simpler to "exit" that to try to work through any messy bargaining and conflictual disagreements within the group (Norris 2004, p.33).

This research has shown that new technologies presents new opportunities and future challenges for marginalised communities. When evaluating these effects, researchers of educational communities need to acknowledge the complex social systems within which social practice is created, transmitted and reproduced. To some extent, the findings of the study resonate with proponents of social shaping theory working in the wider field of digital education. This perspective is one that broadly recognises that social actors *shape* and are *simultaneously* shaped by their use of new technologies.

9.7   Future work

To take this work forward, future longitudinal research could map the experiences of home-educated learners as they transition into further education. Future research could to explore the ways in which previously home-educated young people draw on the soft-skills and sense of identity as they negotiate the boundaries between home-education and University life. This work could generate meaningful insight into the long-term outcomes of home-education.

Although this study identified some of the software programmes and online courses utilised in home-education, this area is still significantly under-researched. Further work could explore more closely, the extent to which the use of mobile learning devices in home-education have transformed learning for example. In his adaptation of transactional distance theory, Park (2011) explains that despite a rapidly growing body of research on mobile learning, few studies have explored the implications of how e-learning has changed through the advancements mobile learning devices. Arguably, the extent to which to which these tools facilitate ubiquitous forms of learning in home-education would be a fruitful area for future investigation.

One of topics that was not explored in this research was the ways in which home-educators manage their child's safety online. Notably, if home-educated and distance learners alike are spending more and more time online then this is an important theme to examine. In this study, two parents described themselves as 'luddites' (digitally illiterate) and this may have implications regarding the extent to which they could effectively manage their child's safety while online. Exploring this area further would serve as productive a timely response the wider policy agenda outlined in Children's Commissioner for England's recently published report 'Growing Up Digital' (2017).

9.8   Closing remarks

This thesis was a meaningful and worthwhile pursuit. I would like to close with a reminder that giving voice to communities who engage in alternative forms of provision is a step towards an understanding of education as truly multi-model. Although this study generated more questions than it did answers, to quote Fredrick Nietzsche:

"A matter that becomes clear ceases to concern us"

-Fredrick Nietzsche

Chapter 10 :Bibliography

Academies Act 2010. c.32.

Andrade, A. 2008. *An exploratory Study of the Role of Technology in the Rise of Home-schooling*. PhD Thesis. Ohio University.

Anthony, K. V. 2015. Educational cooperatives and the changing nature of home-education: Finding balance between autonomy, support, and accountability. *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning* 9(18), pp. 36-63.

Apple, M. W. 2000. Away with all the teachers the cultural politics of home schooling. *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 10(1), pp. 61-80.

Apple, M.W. 2006. *Educating the "right" way markets, standards, God, and Inequality*. 2nd edition. London: Routledge.

Apple, M. W. 2007. Who Needs Teacher Education? Gender, Technology, and the Work of Home Schooling. *Teaching Education Quarterly* 34(1), pp. 111-130.

Apple, M. W. 2011. Rightist Education and Godly Technology: Cultural Politics, Gender, and the Work of Home Schooling. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research* 1(1), pp. 5-33.

Apple, W.M. 2015. Education as God Wants It Gender, Labour and Home Schooling. In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 286-302.

Arora, T. 2006. Elective home-education and special educational needs. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs,* 6(1), pp. 55-66.

Association of Internet Researchers 2012. *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Version 2.0: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee* [Online]. Available at: www.aoir.org/documents/ethics-guide/ [Accessed 13 December 2012].

Atkinson, P. and Coffey, A. 2004. 'Analysing documentary realities. In: Silverman, D ed. *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice.* 2nd edition. London: Sage: 56-75.

Aurini, J. and Davies, S. 2005. Choice without markets home-schooling in the context of private education. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26(4), pp. 461-474.

Badman, G. 2009. *Review of Elective Home-education in England*. London: DCSF.

Ball, S. J. 2002. *Class Strategies and the Education Market: The Middle Classes and Social Advantage*. London: Routledge.

Ball, S. J. 2006. *Education policy and social class: the selected works of Stephen J. Ball*. London: New York: Routledge.

Baltar, F. and Brunet, I. 2012. Social research 2.0: virtual snowball sampling method using Facebook. *Internet Research*, 22 (1), pp.57-74.

Baym, N. 2010. *Personal Connections in the Digital Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Barton, D. and Tusting, K. 2005. *Beyond Communities of Practice: Language, Power and Social Context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bassey, M. 1999. *Case study research in educational settings*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bauman, Z. 2000. *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Baxter, P. and Jacke, S. 2008. Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report* 13(4), pp. 544-559.

Bazeley, P. 2004. Issues in Mixing Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches to Research, In R, Ruber, J. Gardner and L. Richards (eds*). Applying qualitative methods to marketing management research*. London: Palgrave Macmillan: 141-156.

Bagguley, P. 1992. Social Change, the middle class and the emergence of 'new social movements: a critical analysis. *The Sociological Review* 40(1), pp. 26-48.

Beck, C. W. 2006. Home-education: Globalization otherwise? *Managing Global Transitions*, 4(3), pp. 249-259.

Beck, C. W. 2010. Home-education: The Social Motivation. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education* 3(1), pp. 71-81.

Beck, C. W. 2015. Home-education and Social Integration. In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan: 87-98.

Beck, U. 1992. *Risk society: Towards a new modernity*. London: SAGE.

Belfield, C. R. 2004. *How many homeschoolers are there?* New York: National Centre for the study the Study of Privatization in Education.

Bendell, J. 1987 *School's Out Educating your child at home.* Bath:

Bengry-Howell, A. and Griffin, C., 2012. Negotiating access in ethnographic research with 'hard to reach' young people: Establishing common ground or a process of methodological grooming? *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 15 (5), pp. 403-416.

Bernstein, B. 2000. *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research, Critique*. 2nd revised edition. Boston: Roman and Littlefield Publishers Inc.

Bernstein, B. 1975a. *Class, Codes and Control Volume 3: Towards a Theory of Educational Transmissions*. 1st edition. London: Routledge.

Bernstein, B. 1975b. Class and Pedagogies: Visible and Invisible. *Education Studies*, 1 (1),pp. 23-41.

Bernstein, B. 1971. On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge. In M. Young (Ed.), *Knowledge and Control*, pp.47-69. London: Collier-Macmillan.

Berry, C., So-yong, K., and Spigel, L. 2010. *Electronic Elsewhere: Media, Technology, and the Experience of Social Space*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota.

Bertozzi, V. 2006. *Unschooling Media: Participatory Practices among Progressive Homeschoolers*. Masters of Science Thesis. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Blacker, S. 1981. *Case Studies in home-education*. Med thesis. University of Sussex.

Blokhuis, J. C. 2010. Whose custody is it anyway?: 'Home-schooling' from a *parents patriae* perspective. *Theory and Research in Education,* 8, pp. 199-222.

Bolton, P. 2012 *Education: Historical statistics*. London: Social and General Statistics, House of Commons.

Bourdieu P. 1986. The forms of capital. In: Richardson JG (ed.) *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. New York: Greenwood, pp. 241-258.

Bourdieu, P. 1979. Symbolic Power. *Critique of Anthropology*, 4 (1), 77-85.

Bourdieu, P. 1973. Cultural reproduction and social reproduction. In R. Brown (Ed.), *Knowledge, Education and Social Change*. London: Tavistock.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. 1990. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture 2nd Edition*. CA: Sage Publications.

Boulter, H. 1989. The World-wide Education Service: 100 years of servicing parents as educators. *Educational Review*, 41(2), pp. 181-188.

Boyatzis, R. 1998. *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*. London: Sage Publications.

Boyd, d. 2014. *It's complicated: the social lives of networked teens*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Brake, D. 2014. *Sharing our lives online: risks and exposure in social media*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. 2006. Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77-101.

Brinkmann, S. and Kvale, S. 2015. *InterViews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. 3rd ed. London: Sage.

British Educational Research Association. 2011. *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research 2011* [Online]. Available at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/researchers-resources/publications/bera-ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-2011 [Accessed 05 December 2012].

Brown, J.S. and Duguid, P 1991. Organizational learning and communities-of-practice: Toward a unified view of working, learning, and innovating. *Organization Science* 2(1), pp. 40–57.

Brown, J.S. and Duguid, P. 2000. *The Social Life of Information.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

Brown, J.S. and Duguid, P. 2001. Knowledge and organization: A social-practice perspective, *Organization Science*, 12(2), pp. 198–213.

Brown, P. 2011. *The global auction: the broken promises of education, jobs and incomes*. New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brown, P., Power, S., Tholen, G., Allouch, A., 2014. Credentials, talent and cultural capital: a comparative study of educational elites in England and France. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 37(2), pp. 191-211.

Brown, S.J. and Duguid, P. 2001. Knowledge and Organisation: A Social-Practice Perspective. *Organization Science* 12(2), pp. 198-213.

Brown, S.J. and Duguid, P. 2000. *The Social Life of Information*. 1st edition. Massachusetts Harvard Business School Press.

Bryman, A. 1988. *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*. New edition. London: Routledge.

Bryman, A. 2008. *Social Research Methods*. 3rd edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bullock, K. 2011. *Home Schooling and Technology: What is the Connection? A Collective Case Study in Southeast Ohio*. PhD Thesis. Ohio University.

Burke, B. a. 2007. *Home-education: the experience of parents in a divided community*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, Institute of Education (University of London).

Burt R, S. 2005. *Brokerage and Closure: An Introduction to Social Capital*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Children's Commissioner for England 2017. Growing Up Digital: A report from the Children's Commissioner's Growing Up Digital Taskforce, 4th of January [Online]. Available at: http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Growing%20Up%20D igital%20Taskforce%20Report%20January%202017_0.pdf [Accessed 04 January 2017].

Coffey, A and Atkinson, P. 1996. *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Conroy, J. C. 2010. The state, parenting, and the populist energies of anxiety. *Educational theory* 60(3), pp. 325-340.

Contu, A. and Willmot, H. 2003. Re-embedding situatedness, The importance of power relations in learning theory, *Organization Science*, 14(3), pp. 283–296.

Cox, A. 2005. What are Communities of Practice? A comparative review of four seminal works, *Journal of Information Science*, 31(6), pp. 527–540.

D'Arcy, K. 2014. Home-education, school, Travellers and educational inclusion. *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 35(5), pp. 818-835.

D'Arcy, K. 2012. *Elective home-education and traveller families in contemporary times educational spaces and equality.* Ed. Thesis, University of Sheffield.

Data Protection Act 1998. c. 29.

Davies, R. 2015. Home-education: then and now. *Oxford Review of Education* 41(4), pp. 534-548.

Delahooke, M. M. 1986. *Home-educated children's social/emotional adjustment and academic achievement: A comparative study*. PhD Thesis. California School of Professional Psychology, Los Angeles.

Delamont, S. 2002. *Fieldwork in educational settings: methods, pitfalls and perspectives*. 2nd ed. ed. London: Routledge.

Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. 2005 (Eds.). The SAGE *Handbook of Qualitative Research (3rd ed)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. 2006. *Sociological Methods A Sourcebook* (fifth printing). New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.

Denzin, N. K. and Giardina, M. D. 2007. *Ethical futures in qualitative research: decolonizing the politics of knowledge*. Walnut Creek, Calif: Left Coast Press.

Department for Children, Schools and Families. 2007. *Elective Home-education Guidelines for Local Authorities,* London: Stationary Office.

Department for Children, Schools and Families. 2010. *Improving the outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils final report*. Research Report DFE-RR043. London: Department for Education.

Department for Education. 2013a. *Elective home-education guidelines Clarification on Flexi-Schooling*, 22nd of February [Online]. Available at http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/pupilsupport/parents/involvement/homeeducation/a0073367/elective-home-education-guidelines [Accessed 3 September 2013].

Department for Education. 2013b. 'Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics, January 2013, Statistical First Release' *Department for Education, National Statistics*. London: Stationary Office.

De Zwart, F. 2015. Unintended by not unanticipated consequences. *Theory and Society*, 44 (3), pp.283-297.

Dijck, J. v. 2013. *The culture of connectivity: a critical history of social media*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.

Dillon, L. 2012. E-mail as an arena for authoring a dialogical self among gifted young adolescents: A qualitative study. *International Journal for Dialogical Science*, 6(2), pp. 1-33.

Donk, W. D., Loader, B. D., Nixon, P. G., Rucht, D. 2004. *Cyberprotest: new media, citizens, and social movements*. London & New York: Routledge.

Dowty, T. 2000. *Free range education: how home-education works*. Stroud: Hawthorn.

Duncan, S. 2005. Mothering, class and rationality. *The Sociological Review* 53(1), pp. 50-76.

Economic and Social Research Council 2012. *ESRC Framework for research ethics: Updated January 2015* [Online]. Available at: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/files/funding/guidance-for-applicants/esrc-framework-for-research-ethics-2015/ [Accessed 13 July 2015].

Eddis, S. 2007. *A comparative study of attitudes towards home-education, held by state officials and home-educators in England and Wales, and in Florida, USA* [Online]. University of Surrey. Available at http://epubs.surrey.ac.uk/771345/1/504949.pdf [Accessed. 8 October 2016]

Eddis, S. 2015. A Case of Mistaken Identity: Perspectives of Home-educators and State Officials in England and Wales, And in Florida USA. In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan:99-110. McAvoy, A. 2015. How are New Technologies Impacting Elective Home Learners? In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 74- 86.

Education Act 1996. (c. Section 7). London: HMSO.

Education Otherwise Association Ltd. 2010a *About EO: History* [Online]. Available at http://www.educationotherwise.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46&Itemid=221 [Accessed 28 September 2013].

Education Otherwise Association Ltd. 2010b *Research Archive: home-education FAQs* [Online]. Available at

http://www.educationotherwise.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=section&id=16&It emid=220 [Accessed 26 September 2013].

Education Otherwise. 2016. *Educationotherwise.net: Local groups* [Online]. Available at: http://www.educationotherwise.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=106&It emid=86 [Accessed: 02 August 2016].

Ellison, B, N. and Lampe, E, C. 2011. Connection strategies: Social capital implications of Facebook-enabled communication practices. *New Media & Society*, 13 (6), pp.-873-892.

Ensign, J. 2000. Defying the stereotypes of special education: Home school students. *Peabody Journal of Education,* 75(1&2), pp. 147-158.

Evans, G. 2007. *Educational failure and working class white children in Britain*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fensham-Smith, A. 2014. Gypsy and Traveller Education: Engaging Families- A Research Report, Welsh Government, Available at: http://gov.wales/docs/caecd/research/2014/141125-gypsy-traveller-education-engaging-families-en.pdf [Accessed 01 December 2015].

Field, J. 2009. *Lifelong Learning and the New Educational Order* [second edition]. Staffordshire: Trentham Books Limited.

Flick, U. (ed.). 2007. *Designing Qualitative Research: The Sage Qualitative Research Kit*. London: Sage.

Fortune-Wood, J. 2000. *Doing it their way: home-based education and autonomous learning*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics.

Fortune-Wood, J. 2001. *Bound to be free: home-based education as a positive alternative to paying the hidden costs of 'free' education*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics.

Fortune-Wood, M. 2005a. *The Face of Home-Based Education 1: who, why and how?* Nottingham: Educational Heretics.

Fortune-Wood, M. 2005b. *The Face of Home-Based Education 2: Numbers,* Nottingham: Educational Heretics.

Fortune-Wood, M. 2006. *Support, Special Needs.* Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press.

Fraser, N. 1999. Social justice in the age of identity politics: Redistribution, recognition and participation. In: Larry Ray and Andrew Sayer, eds, *Culture and Economy after the Cultural Turn*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999, pp. 25-52.

Frost, E. A. and Morris, R. C. 1988. Does home-schooling work? Some insights for academic success. *Contemporary Education,* 59, pp. 223-227.

Gabb,J. 2010. Home truths: ethical issues in family research. *Qualitative Research*, 10 (4), pp.461-478.

Gherardi, S. 2009. The critical power of the 'practice lens'. *Management Learning*, 40(2), pp. 115–128.

Gherardi, S. and Nicolini, D. 2002. Learning in a constellation of interconnected practices Canon or dissonance?, *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(4), pp. 419–436.

Giddens A. 1991. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Gillham, B. 2000. *Case study research methods*. London: Continuum.

Giroux, H. 2016. Beyond Pedagogies of Repression. *Monthly Review,* 67 (10) [Online]. Available at: http://monthlyreview.org/2016/03/01/beyond-pedagogies-of-repression/ [Accessed 01 September 2016].

Goiria, M. 2015. Carnival of Blogs: An Example of Facilitating Intercultural Relations in Hispanic Home-education. In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 303-113.

Gordon, O., 2016. *Hating the new SATS? Meet the mums who chose home-education over 'sausage factory' schools* The Telegraph [Online]. Available at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/family/hating-the-new-sats-meet-the-mums-who-chose-home-education-over/ [Accessed: 05 May 2016].

Grabowicz, P.A., Ramasco, J.J., Moro, E., Pujol, J.M., And Eguiluz, V.M. 2012. Social Features of Online Networks: The Strength of Intermediary Ties in Online Social Media. *PLoS One* , 7(1) [Online]. Available from: http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0029358 [Accessed 03 September 2013].

Green-Hennessy, S. 2014. Homeschooled adolescents in the United States Developmental outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence* 37(4), pp. 441-449.

Greene, J. C., and Caracelli, V. J. 1997. Defining and describing the paradigm issues in mixed-method evaluation. In J. C. Greene and V.J, Caracelli (Eds), *Advances in mixed-method evaluation: The challenges and benefits of integrating diverse paradigms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 5-18.

Greenfield, T.K., Midanik, L.T. and Rogers, J.D. 2000. Effects of Telephone versus Face-to-Face Interview Modes on Reports of Alcohol Consumption, Addiction, 95 (20), pp. 277-284.

Greig, A. and Taylor, J. 1999. *Doing research with children.* 1st edition. London: Sage.

Greig, A. and Taylor, J. And Mackay, T., 2013. *Doing Research with Children: A practical guide.* 3rd edition. London: Sage

Guba, E. G. And Lincoln, Y.S. 1994. Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin and Y. S Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 105-117.

Gutherson, P. and Mountford-Lees, J. 2011. New Models for Organising Education: "Flexi schooling"- How One School Does it Well: a Guidance Report [Online]. UK: CfBT Education Trust [Available at http://hollinsclough.staffs.sch.uk/Flexi%20files/Hollinsclough%20CfBT%20Report.pdf [Accessed 12 April 2015].

Hamalainen, K. 2013. Participants' home as an interview context when studying sensitive family issues. *Journal of Comparative Social work*, 14 (1), pp. 1-30.

Hammersely, M. 1999. Not bricolage but boatbuilding: Exploring two metaphors for thinking about ethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 28 (6), pp.574-585

Hammersley, M. 2013. *What is qualitative research?* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Hanna, L. G. 2012. Home-schooling Education: Longitudinal Study of Methods, Materials, and

Curricula. *Education and Urban Society* 44(5), pp. 609-631.

Hauseman, D. C. 2011. '"Nerdy Know-it-Alls" and "Paranoid Parents", pp. Images of Alternative Learning in Films and Television Programs", *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning*, 5(1), pp. 1-17.

Hern, M. 1996. *Deschooling our lives*. Gabriola Island, B.C: New Society.

Hildreth, M. P. and Kimble, C. (Eds.) 2004. *Knowledge Networks: Innovation Through Communities of Practice*. London: Idea Group Publishing.

HM Government. 2016a. *The national curriculum: key stage 1 and 2* [Online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/national-curriculum/overview [Accessed: 12 June 2016].

HM Government 2016b. *More choice as over 80,000 new free school places created: Press Release* [Online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/Government/news/more-choice-as-over-80000-new-free-schools-places-created [Accessed: 12 June 2016].

Holt, J. 1977. *Instead of Education*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Holt, J. 1984. *How children fail.* New York: Delacorte Press.

Holt, J. 1997. *Teach your own: a hopeful path for education*. 3rd edition. Lighthouse.

Hong, J. F.O. 2009. Conflicting identities and power between Communities of Practice: The case of IT outsourcing. *Management Learning* 40(3), pp. 311–326.

Hopwood, V. O'Neil, L., Castro, G. and Hodgson, B. 2007. *The Prevalance of Home-education in England: A Feasibility Study*. Research Report [Online]. Available at: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RR827.pdf [Accessed: 8 October 2016].

Hughes, J., Jewson, N., Unwin, L. 2007. *Communities of Practice: critical perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Hutchinson, S., Fenton-O'Creevy, M., Goodliff, G., Edwards, D., Hartnett, L., Holti, R., Mackay, E., McKeogh, S., Sansoyer, P. and Way, L. 2015. Introduction: An invitation to a conversation. In: Wenger-Trayner, E., Fenton-O'Creevy, M., Hutchinson, C., Kubiak,C. and Wenger-Trayner, B. (Eds) *Learning in a landscape of practice: Boundaries, identity, and knowledgeability in practice-based learning*. London: Routledge, pp. 1-10.

Illeris, K. 2009. (Ed) *Contemporary theories of learning: learning theorists in their own words*. London: Routledge.

Illich, I. 1970. *Deschooling society*. New York, NY: Harper Colophon Books.

Illich, I. 1976. *After Deschooling, What?* London: Writers and Readers Publishing Cooperative.

Irvine, A., Drew, P. and Sainsbury, R. 2013. 'Am I not answering your questions properly?': Clarification, adequacy and responsiveness in semi-structured telephone and face-to-face interviews, *Qualitative Research*, 13 (1), pp. 87-106.

Jabareen, Y. 2009. Building a Conceptual Framework: Philosophy, Definitions and Procedure. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8 (4), pp. 49-62.

Jamieson, L., Simpson, R. and Lewis, R. 2011. *Researching Families and Relationships: Reflections on Process*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Jarvis, P. 2009. *Globalisation, Lifelong Learning and The Learning Society: Sociological Perspectives* [Vol. 2]. Oxford: Routledge.

Jenkins, R. 1992. *Pierre Bourdieu* [revised edition]. London: Routledge.

Jolly, J. L., Matthews, M. S., Nester, J. 2013. Home-schooling the Gifted: A Parent's Perspective. *Gifted Child Quarterly* 57(2), pp. 121-134.

Jones, B. 2011. *A critical discourse analysis of the 2010. Ofsted summary report into home-education.* University of London, King's College.

Jordan, A. 2006. Make yourself at home: the social construction of research roles in family studies. *Qualitative Research*, 6 (2), pp. 169-185

Klinger, S. 2005. '"Are they talking yet?" Online Discourse as Political Action. *Open Journal Systems Demonstration Journal*, 1(1), pp. 1-10.

Koliba, C. and Gajda, R. 2009. "Communities of Practice" as an Analytical Construct: Implications for Theory and Practice, *International Journal of Public Administration*, 32:2, pp. 97-135.

Kraftl, P. 2013. *Geographies of Alternative Education*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Kraftl, P. 2014. What are alternative education spaces- and why do they matter? *Geography*, 99, pp.128-139.

Krantz, D. L. 1995. Sustaining versus resolving the quantitative-qualitative debate. *Evaluation and Program and Planning*, 18, pp.89-96.

Kubiak,C., Cameron, S., Conole, G., Fenton-O'Creevy, M., Mylrea, P., Rees, E. and Shreeve, A. 2015. Multimembership and identification. In: Wenger-Trayner, E., Fenton-O'Creevy, M., Hutchinson, C., Kubiak,C. and Wenger-Trayner, B. (Eds) *Learning in a landscape of practice: Boundaries, identity, and knowledgeability in practice-based learning*. London: Routledge, pp. 64-81.

Kunzman, R. 2012. 'Education, schooling, and children's rights The complexity of home-schooling. *Educational Theory, 62*(1), pp. 75-89.

Kunzman, R. and Gaither, M. 2013. Home-schooling: A Comprehensive Survey of the Research, *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, 2(1), pp. 4-59.

Kvale, S. 1996. *InterViews: An introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. London: Sage.

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. 1991. *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. 1st edition. Cambridge: University Press.

Lampel, J. and Bhalla, A. 2007. The Role of Status Seeking in Online Communities Giving the Gift of Experience. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 12(2), pp. 434-455.

Lareau, A. 2003. *Unequal childhoods*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Lee, R. 1999. *Doing research on sensitive topics*. London: Sage.

Lees, H.E. 2013. *Education without schools: discovering alternatives*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Lees, H.E. 2012. A politics of the other in education. *Other Education: the journal of*

educational alternatives, 1(1), pp.130-140.

Lees, H.E. 2011. *The Gateless Gate of Home-education Discovery: What happens to the self of adults upon discovery of the possibility and possibilities of an educational alternative?* PhD Thesis, The University of Birmingham.

Liang, Y., Zhou, X., Guo, B., and Zhiwen, Y. 2012 'Understanding the Regularity and Variability of Human Mobility from Geo-trajectory. *Web Intelligence and Intelligent Agent Technology*, 1 (4-7), pp. 409-414.

Lina, V 2011. 'Homeschool Technology and Online Communication. *Home School Researcher*, 26 (1), pp. 1-7.

Loftland , J. and Loftland, L. H. 1995. *Analysing Social Settings*. 3rd edition. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.

Lowden, S., 1994. *The scope and implications of home-based education*. PhD Thesis. University of Nottingham.

Lowe, J. and Thomas, A. 2002. *Educating your child at home*. London: Continuum.

Lubienski, C. 2000. 'Whither the common good? A critique of home-schooling. *Peabody Journal of Education, 75* (1&2), pp. 207-232.

Lubienski, C. 2003. 'A critical view of home-education. *Evaluation and Research in Education*, *17*(2&3), pp. 167-178.

Lubienski, C. and Brewer, J.T. 2015. Does Home-education 'Work'? Challenging the Assumptions behind the Home-education Movement. In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan ,pp. 136-150.

Mansell., W., Harris, P., 2016. *DIY schooling on the rise as more parents opt for home-education* The Guardian [Online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/apr/12/home-schooling-parents-education-children-england [Accessed: 02 September 2016].

Marples, R. 2014. Parents' Rights and Educational Provision. *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 33(1), pp. 23-39.

Mason, C. M. 1904. *Parents and children*. 3rd edition. [S.l.]: Kegan Paul.

Mason, C. M. 1930. *Home-education*. 13th ed. ed. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner.

Mason, J. 2002. *Qualitative Researching*. 2nd edition. London: Sage Publications.

Mason, J. 2006. Mixing methods in a qualitatively driven way, *Qualitative Research*, 6 (1), pp.9-25.

Marpsat, M. and Razafindratsima, N. 2010. Survey methods for hard-to-reach populations: introduction to the special issue. *Methodological Innovations Online*, 5 (2), pp.3-16.

Mayberry, M. 1988. The 1987-1988 Oregon home school survey: An overview of findings. *Home School Researcher*, 4(1), pp.1-9.

Mayberry, M. 1988. Characteristics and attitudes of families who home school. *Education and Urban Society*, 21(1), pp.32-41.

Mayberry, M. And Knowles, J. G. 1989. Family unit objectives of parents who teach their

children: Ideological and pedagogical orientations to home schooling. *Urban Review,* 21, pp. 209-225.

Mazama, A. and Lundy, G. 2015. African American Home-schooling and the Quest for a Quality Education. *Education and Urban Society* 47(2), pp. 160-181.

McAvoy, A. 2015. How are New Technologies Impacting Elective Home Learners? In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.74- 86.

McCraken, G. 1998. *The Long Interview*. Newberry Park, CA: Sage.

McDonald, J. and Lopes, E. 2014. How parents' home-educate their children with an autism spectrum disorder with the support of the Schools of Isolated and Distance Education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 18(1), pp. 1-17.

Mecham, A. N. 2004. The socialization of home-schooled children in rural Utah. PhD Thesis, Utah State University, Logan.

Medlin, R. G. 2000. Home schooling and the Question of Socialization. *Peabody Journal of Education* 75(1&2), pp.107–123.

Medlin, R. G. 2013. Home-schooling and the Question of Socialization Revisited. *Peabody Journal of Education* 88(3), pp. 284-297.

Meighan, R. 1995. Home-based education effectiveness research and some of its implications. *Educational Studies*, 10, pp. 273-286.

Meighan, R. 1997. *The Next Learning System: and why home-schoolers are trailblazers.* Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press.

Meighan, R. 2001a. *25 years of home-based education: research, reviews and case material*. Nottingham: Education Now.

Meighan, R. 2001b. *Learning unlimited: the home-based education files*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics.

Meighan, R. 2005. *Comparing learning systems: the good, the bad, the ugly and the counter-productive*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics.

Meighan, R. 2007. *John Holt*. London: Continuum.

Merriam, S. B. 1988. *Case study research in education: a qualitative approach*. San Francisco ; London: Jossey-Bass.

Merry, S. M. and Howell, C. 2009. Can intimacy justify home-education? *Theory and Research in Education* 7(3), pp. 363-381.

Merton, R. 1936. The unanticipated consequences of purposive social action. *American Sociological Review,* 1(6), 894.-904.

Milan, S. 2013. *Social movements and their technologies wiring social change*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Miles, M. B. and Huberman, A. M. 1994. *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded source book*. 2nd edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mitra, S. 2015. Minimally Invasive Education: Pedagogy for Development in a Connected World. In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 254-277.

Monk, D 2004. Problematising home-education: Challenging "parental rights" and "socialisation", *Legal Studies, 24(4),* pp. 568-598.

Monk, D. 2015. Home-education: A Human Right? In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 166-178.

Morris, E. W. 2014. Home Is Where the School Is The Logic of Home-schooling and the Emotional Labor of Mothering. *Contemporary Sociology-a Journal of Reviews* 43(5), pp. 711-713.

Morton, R. 2011. *Balancing Pleasure and Pain: the role of motherhood in home-education.* PhD Thesis, University of Warwick.

Morton, R. 2010. Home-education: Constructions of Choice. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education* 3(1), pp. 46-56.

Mountney, R. 2009a. *Learning without school: home-education*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Mountney, R. 2012. *A Funny Kind of Education*. London: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Murphy, J. 2014. The Social and Educational Outcomes of Home-schooling. *Sociological Spectrum* 34(3), pp. 244-272.

Nelson, J. 2013. *Home-education: exploring the views of parents, children and young people.* Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham.

Nemer, K. 2002 'Understudied education: toward building a home-schooling research agenda. *National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education*. 48(1), pp. 1-21. Available at http://ncspe.org/publications_files/114_OP48.pdf, retrieved 19 September 2013.

Neuman, A. and Aviram, A. 2003. 'Home-schooling as a fundamental change in lifestyle. *Evaluation & Research in Education, 17*(2&3), pp. 132-143.

Neuman, A. and Aviram, A. 2015. Home-schooling- The Choice and the Consequences. In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 211-222

Notely, T. 2009. Young People, Online Networks, and Social Inclusion. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14(4), pp. 1208-1227.

Norris, P. 2004. The Bridging and Bonding Role of Online Communities. In P.N, Howard and S. Jones (Eds.) *Society Online: The Internet in Context*. London: Sage Publications, pp.31-42.

Office for National Statistics. 2011. *2011. Census Key Statistics for England and Wales* [Online]. Available at: http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populatione stimates/bulletins/2011censuskeystatisticsforenglandandwales/2012-12-11 [Accessed 10 October 2016].

Office for National Statistics 2012 'Families and Households, 2012. *Statistical Bulletin, 24th of November* [online]. Available at http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171778_284823.pdf [Accessed 23 September, 2013].

Office for National Statistics 2013 '*Family size in 2012.*' [Online]. Available at http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/family-size/2012/family-size-pdf.pdf [Accessed: 8 October 2016].

Office for National Statistics 2013 '*Labour Market Supply. Nomis Official labour market statistics'* [online]. Available at http://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/gor/2013265930/report.aspx#tabempocc [Accessed 20 September 2013].

The Office for National Statistics. 2016b. *Statistical bulletin: Internet Access- Households and Individuals*, 4th of August 2016 [Online]. Available at: http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/householdcharacteristics/homeinternetandsocialmediausage/bulletins/internetaccesshouseholdsandindividuals/2016 [Accessed 20 August 2016].

Office for National Statistics. 2016a. *Primary set or harmonised concepts and questions: Guidance and Methodology* [Online]. Available at:http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/harmonisation/primary-set-of-harmonised-concepts-and-questions/index.html [Accessed: 05 September 2016].

Ofqual. 2014. *Timeline of changes to GCSEs, AS and A levels: Schools, colleges and children's services guidance* [Online]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/Government/publications/timeline-of-changes-to-gcses-as-and-a-levels [Accessed: 10 June 2016].

Oliveira, P. C. M. de, Watson, T. G., & Sutton, J. P. 1994. Differences in critical thinking skills among students educated in public schools, Christian schools, and home schools. *Home School Researcher, 10*(4), pp. 1-8.

Oliver, G D., Serovich, M.J. and Mason, L.T. 2005. Constraints and Opportunities with Interview Transcription: Towards Reflection in Qualitative Research, *Social Forces* 84 (2), pp. 1273- 1290.

Orlikowski, W.J. 2002. Knowing in practice: Enacting a collective capability in distributed organizing. *Organization Science* 13(3), pp. 249–273.

Ormrod, S., Ferlie, E., Warren, F. and Norton, K. 2007. The appropriation of new organizational forms within networks of practice: Founder and founder-related ideological power. Human Relations 60(5), pp. 745–767.

Onwuegbuzie A. and Combs.J. 2011. Data Analysis in Mixed Research: A Primer*, International Journal of Education,* 3 (1), pp. 1-25.

Park, Y. 2011. A Pedagogical Framework for Mobile Learning: Categorizing Educational Applications of Mobile Technologies into Four Types, *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 12.2, pp. 79- 95.

Pattison, H. 2012. Wising up after Badman: Learning Lessons from The *Badman Review* of Home-education in England 2009. *Presenting The Global Home-education Movement: Proceedings of the Global Home-education Conference.* Berlin, 1-4 November, 2012 [Online], pp.1-15. Available at: http://www.ghec2012.org/cms/ [Accessed 10 May 2015].

Pattison, H. 2015. How to Desire Differently: Home-education as a Heterotopia. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, pp.1-19.

Patton, M. Q, 1988. Paradigms and Pragmatism. In D. M Fettermen (ed.), *Qualitative approaches to evaluation in education: the silent scientific revolution*. New York: Praeger: 116-137.

Parsons, S. and Lewis, A. 2010a. The Home-Education of Children with Special Needs or Disabilities in the UK: Views of Parents from an Online Survey. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 14(1), pp. 67-86.

Parsons, S. and Lewis, A. 2010b. The home-education of children with special needs or disabilities in the UK: views of parents from an online survey. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 14(1), pp. 67-86.

Pateman, T. 2011. Rural and Urban areas comparing lives rural/urban classifications. *Regional Trends* 43, pp. 11-43.

Petrie, A. 1992. *Home-education and the local education authority: From conflict to cooperation*. PhD Thesis, University of Liverpool.

Petrie, A. J. 2001. Home-education in Europe and the implementation of changes to the law. *International Review of Education,* 47(5), pp. 477-500.

Pollock, I. 2016. 'Concerns' raised before Dylan Seabridge died from scurvy, *BBC News* 21st of January [Online] [Available at http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-35361261 [Accessed 20 January].

Power, S. and Taylor, C. 2013. Social Justice and Education in the Public and Private Spheres. *Oxford Review of Education*. 39(4), pp. 464-479.

Putnam, R. D. 2000. *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of America community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Quaqish, B. 2007. An analysis of homeschooled and non-homeschooled students' performance on an ACT mathematics achievement test. *Home School Researcher* 17(2), pp. 1-12.

Ray, B. D. 1997 *Home-education across the United States Family characteristics, student achievement, and other topics*. Purcellville, VA: HSLDA Publications.

Ray, B. D. 1999 *Home schooling on the threshold: A survey of research at the dawn of the millennium*. Salem, or National Home-education Research Institute Publications.

Ray, B. D. 2010. Academic achievement and demographic traits of homeschool students: A nationwide study. *Academic Leadership: The Online Journal*, 8. Available from: http://www.academicleadership.org/ [Accessed 2 August 2013].

Reay, D., Crozier, G. and James, D. 2011. *White Middle-Class Identities and Urban Schooling*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Reich, R. 2002 'Testing the boundaries of parental authority over education: The case of home-schooling. In: S. Macedo & Y. Tamir (Eds.), *Moral and political education*. New York: NYU Press. pp. 275-313.

Reich, R. 2008. 'On regulating home-schooling: A reply to Glanzer. *Educational Theory,* 58(1), pp.17-23.

Reich, S., Subrahmanyam, K. and Espinoza, G. 2012. Friending, IMing, and hanging out face-to-face: Overlap in adolescents' online and offline social networks. *Developmental Psychology*, 48(2), pp. 356-368.

Roberts, J. 2006. Limits to Communities of Practice. *Journal of Management Studies* 43(3), pp. 623–639.

Robinson, K. 2006. TED Talks. *Do Schools Kill Creativity?* [Video]. 20 Febuary 2006. Available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity?language=en [Accessed: 01 September 2016].

Robinson, K. and Aronica, L. 2015. Creative Schools: The Grassroots Revolution That's Transforming Education. New York: Penguin Books.

Rose, F. 1997. Toward a Class-Cultural Theory of Social Movements Reinterpreting New Social Movements on JSTOR. *Sociological Forum* 12(3), pp. 461-494.

Ross, C. J. 2010. Fundamentalist challenges to core democratic values Exit and home-schooling. *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal*, 18(4), pp. 991-1014.

Rothermel, P. 2015. Home-education: A Desperately Dangerous Nation? In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 189-210.

Rothermel, P. 2011. Setting the record straight: Interviews with a hundred British home-educating families. *Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning,* 5 (10), pp.20-57.

Rothermel, P. 2004. Home-education: Comparison of home- and school-educated children on PIPS baseline assessments. *Journal of Early Childhood Research* 2(3), pp. 273-299.

Rothermel, P. 2003. Can We Classify Motives for Home-education? *Evaluation and Research in Education* 17(2-3), pp. 74-89.

Rothermel, P. J. 2002. *Home-education: rationales, practices and outcomes.* PhD Thesis, The University of Durham.

Rothermel, P. 1999. A nationwide study of home-education: Early indications and wider implications. *Education Now,* 24, pp. 1-25.

Rudner, L. M. 1999. 'Scholastic achievement and demographic characteristics of home school students in 1998. Education *Policy Analysis Archives, Online journal,* 7 [Online]. Available from: http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/543 [Accessed on 2 May 2013].

Sadovnik, R. A. 2001. Profiles of famous educators: Basil Bernstein (1924-2000), *Prospects.* 31 (4), pp. 608- 620.

Safran, B.L. 2008. *Exploring Identity Change and Communities of Practice among Long Term Home-educating Parents*. Unpublished PhD Thesis, The Open University.

Safran, B.L. 2009. 'Situated adult learning: The home-education neighbourhood group. *The Journal of Unschooling and Alternative Learning* [Online]. Available at http://www.nipissingu.ca/jual/Archives/V326/v3262.pdf [Accessed 3 July 2013].

Safran, B.L. 2010. Legitimate peripheral participation and home-education. *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26(1), pp. 107-112.

Safran, B.L. 2012. Home-education: The Power of Trust. Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives, 1 (1),pp. 32-45.

Safran, B.L. 2015. Home-educating Parents: Martyrs or Pathmakers? In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 21-29.

Saunders, M. K. 2010. Previously homeschooled college freshmen: their first year experiences and persistence rates. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 11, pp. 77-100.

Scottish Government 2016a. *National Improvement Framework for Scottish Education: Achieving Excellence and Equity* [Online], Available at: http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0049/00491758.pdf [Accessed: 6 November 2016].

Scottish Government 2016b. Home-education, Parentzone Education Scotland [Online]. Available at: http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/parentzone/myschool/choosingaschool/homeeducation/index.asp [Accessed: 10 November 2016].

Scottish Government 2007. *Home-education guidance*. Available at: http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/207380/0055026.pdf [Accessed: 10 November 2016].

Selwyn, N. 2016. *Is Technology Good for Education?* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Seo, D. 2009. The profitable adventure of threatened middle-class families: An ethnographic study on home-schooling in South Korea. *Asia Pacific Education Review,* 10, pp. 409-422.

Shirkey, B. T. 1987. *Students' perspective of home schools: A descriptive study*. PhD. University of Florida, Gainesville, FL.

Shute, C. 2008. *Joy Baker: trailblazer for home-based education and personalised learning*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics.

Silverman, D. 2011. *Interpreting Qualitative Data*. 4th edition. London: Sage.

Singh, P. 2002. Pedagogising Knowledge: Bernstein's Theory of the Pedagogic Device. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 23 (4), pp. 571-582.

Siraj, I. 2014. *Social Class and Educational Inequality: The Impact of Parents and Schools*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, E. and Nelson, J. 2015. Using the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey to examine the prevalence and characteristics of families who home-educate in the UK. *Educational Studies* 41(3), pp. 312-325.

Social Market Foundation 2016. *Educational inequalities in England and Wales: Commission on Inequality in Education* [Online pdf]. Available at: http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Publication-Commission-on-Inequality-in-Education-Initial-Findings-Slide-Pack-120116.pdf [Accessed: 08 September 2016].

Sorey, K. & Duggan, M. H. 2008. Homeschoolers entering community colleges perceptions of admissions officers. *Journal of College Admissions*, 200, pp. 22-28.

Sperling, J. 2015. Home-education and the European Convention on Human Rights. In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan,pp. 179-188.

Spiegler, T. 2009. Home-education - Situation, Prospects and Risks. *Zeitschrift Fur Soziologie der Erziehung und Sozialisation* 29(3), pp. 282-295.

Sriprakash, A., H. Proctor and Hu, B. 2015. Visible pedagogic work: parenting, private tutoring

and educational advantage in Australia. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 37(3), pp. 426-441.

Stafford, B. 2012. Bad evidence: the curious case of the Government-commissioned review of elective home-education in England and how parents exposed its weaknesses. *Evidence & Policy* 8(3), pp. 361-381.

Stake, R. E. 1995. *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stevens, M. L. 2001. *Kingdom of Children: Culture and Controversy in the Home-schooling Movement*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Stevens, M. L. 2003. The normalisation of home-schooling in the USA. *Evaluation & Research in Education* 17(2&3), pp. 90-100.

Storck, J.S and Storck, L.E. 2004. Trusting the Knowledge of Large Online Communties: Strategies for Leading from Behind. In P. Hildreth and Kimble, C. [Eds]. *Knowledge Networks: Innovation Through Communities of Practice*. London: Idea Group Publishing, pp.230-242.

Sturgers, J. and Hanrahan, K.J. 2004. Comparing Telephone and Face-to-Face Interviewing: a Research Note, *Qualitative Research*, 4 (1), pp. 107-118.

Sutton, J. P. and Galloway, R. S. 2000. College success of students from three high school settings. *Journal of Research and Development in Education*, 33, pp. 137-146.

Sutton, B. 2014. *Teaching and learning online: new models of learning for a connected world: volume 2*. 2nd ed. ed. New York: Routledge.

Taylor, M. 2006. *Rationality and the Ideology of Disconnection*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, C., Rhys, M. and Waldron, S. 2016. Implementing curriculum reform in Wales: the case of the Foundation Phase. Oxford Review of Education 42 (3), pp. 299-315.

Teigland, R. 2003. Knowledge Networking: Structure and Performance in Networks of Practice. Doctoral Dissertation. Stockholm: Stockholm School of Economics.

The Guardian. 2010. The tragedy of Khyra Ishaq's death, 25th of February [Online]. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/feb/25/khyra-ishaq-starving-death-background [Accessed: 01 December 2016].

Thomas, A. 1998. *Educating Children at Home.* London: Cassell.

Thomas, A. and Pattison, H. 2008. *How Children Learn at Home.* 2nd edition. London: Continuum.

Thomas, A. and Pattison, H. 2013. Informal Home-education: Philosophical Aspirations put into Practice. *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 32(2), pp. 141-154.

Thomas, A. and Pattison, H. 2015. The Informal Acquisition and Development of Literacy. In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 57-73.

Tollefson, N. 2007. *Social isolation meets technological innovation: towards developing a model of parents who homeschool*. PhD Thesis. The University of North Dakota.

Vaast, E. 2004. The Use of Intranets: The Missing Link Between Communities of Practice and Networks of Practice. In P. M. Hildreth and Kimble, C. (Eds.) *Knowledge Networks: Innovation Through Communities of Practice*. London: Idea Group Publishing, pp.216-229.

Van Galen, J. 1991. Ideologues and pedagogues Parents who teach their children at

Van Galen, J. 1988. Ideology, curriculum, pedagogy in home-education. *Education and Urban Society* 21(1), pp.52-68.

Vincent, C. and Ball, S. J. 2006. *Childcare, choice and class practices: middle class parents and their children*. London: New York: Routledge.

Vincent, C. and Maxwell, C. 2016. Parenting priorities and pressures furthering understanding of 'concerted cultivation. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 37(2), pp. 269-281.

Walford, G. 1995. Classification and framing in English public boarding schools. In P. Atkinson, B. Davies and S. Delamont (Eds), *Discourse and Reproduction: Essays in Honor of Basil Bernstein*, pp. 191-208. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press.

Waters, L. H., Barbour, M. K., Mechaca, M. P. 2014. The Nature of Online Charter Schools: Evolution and Emerging Concerns. *Educational Technology & Society* 17(4), pp. 379-389.

Wenger-Trayner, E. and Wenger-Trayner, B. 2015. Learning in a landscape of Practice: A Framework. In: Wenger-Trayner, E., Fenton-O'Creevy, M., Hutchinson, C., Kubiak,C. and Wenger-Trayner, B. (Eds) *Learning in a landscape of practice: Boundaries, identity, and knowledgeability in practice-based learning*. London: Routledge, pp. 13-28.

Wenger-Trayner, E., Fenton-O'Creevy, M., Hutchinson, C., Kubiak,C. and Wenger-Trayner, B. (Eds) 2015. *Learning in a landscape of practice: Boundaries, identity, and knowledgeability in practice-based learning*. London: Routledge.

Webb, J. 1988. *Home-based education: some aspects of its practice and consequences.* PhD Thesis. Open University.

Webb, J. 1990. *Children learning at home.* Basingstoke: Falmer Press.

Webb, J. 1999. *Those unschooled minds: home-educated children grow up*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics.

Webb, S. 2011. *Elective Home-education in the UK*. London: Trentham Books Ltd.

Webster, F. 2001. *Culture and politics in the information age: a new politics?* London: New York: Routledge.

Welner, K. M. and Welner, K. G. 1999 'Contextualizing home-schooling data: A response to Rudner. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 7.* [Online]. Available at http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/article/view/548 [Accessed 2 May 2013].

Welsh Assembly Government, 2008. *Inclusion and Pupil Support- Section 6- Elective Home-education; Summary of guidance for schools Section 6 Elective Home-education* [Online]. Available at ales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/pupilsupport/inclusionpupilsupportguidance/section6/?lang=en [Accessed 29 September 2013].

Welsh Assembly Government, 2013 *School census results, 2013: Key points* [Online]. Available at http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2013/school-census-

results-2013/?lang=en [Accessed 20 July 2013].

Wenger, E. 1998. *Communities of Practice : Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger-Trayner, E., Fenton- O'Creevy, M., Hutchinson, S., Kubaik, C. and Wenger-Trayner, B. 2015. *Learning in Landscapes of Practice: Boundaries, Identity and Knowledgeability in Practice-based Learning*. Oxford: Routledge.

West, R. L. 2009. The harms of home-schooling. *Philosophy and Public Policy Quarterly,* 29, pp. 7-11.

Welsh Government 2014. *Qualified for Life: delivering a national qualifications system for Wales in 2015*, Written Statement- Huw Lewis Minister for Education and Skills [Online]. Available at: http://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/previous-administration/2014/qualified4life/?lang=en [Accessed: 09 June 2016].

White, N. 2004. Click Connect and Coalesce for NGOs: Exploring the Intersection Between Online Networks, CoPs, and Events. In P. M. Hildreth and Kimble, C. (Eds.) *Knowledge Networks: Innovation Through Communities of Practice*. London: Idea Group Publishing, pp. 282-294.

White, S., Moore, M., & Squires, J. 2009. 'Examination of previously homeschooled college students with the big five model of personality. *Home School Researcher,* 25(1), pp. 1-7.

White, S., Williford, E., Brower, J., Collins, T., Merry, R., & Washington, M. 2007. Emotional, social, and academic adjustment to college: a comparison between Christian homeschooled and traditionally schooled college freshmen. *Home School Researcher, 17*(4), pp. pp1-7.

Witcher, C. S. G. 2010. Negotiating Transcription as a Relative Insider Implications for Rigor, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 9 (2), pp. 122-132.

Wolfenden, F., 2015. Learning In a Landscapes of Practice: Boundaries, Identity and Knowledgeability in Practice-Based Learning. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education*. 2015(1), p.Art. 9. DOI: http://doi.org/10.5334/jime.as

Woodhouse, B. B. 2002. Speaking Truth to Power Challenging The Power of Parents to Control the Education of Their Own. *Cornell Journal of Public Policy* 11 (1), pp. 481-501.

Woods, P. A. and Woods, G. J. 2009. *Alternative education for the 21st century: philosophies, approaches, visions*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Woolcock, N. 2016. Rise in home-schooling raises fear of children drifting off safety radar, *The Times Education Supplement* 5th of March [Online] [Available at http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/education/article4706283.ece [Accessed 10 March].

Wright, K. 2005. Researching Internet-Based Populations: Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Survey Research, Online Questionnaire Authoring Software Packages, and Web Survey Services. *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication*, 10 (3), pp.00. Available at: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2005.tb00259.x/full [Accessed: 03 September 2016].

Yusof, N. 2015. Parental and Children's Views on Mathematical Learning Within the Home Environment. In: P. Rothermel ed. *International Perspectives on Home-education: Do We Still Need Schools?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 44-56.

Chapter 11 : Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1: Online survey

Q1): Information sheet and consent button

Q2): Gender

Q3): Ethnic Group

What is your ethnic group?
- Choose **one** section from **A** to **E**, then tick **one** box to best describe your ethnic group/background. Alternatively, fill in the *'Any other'* box to describe this your own words

A) White
- ○ English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British
- ○ Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ○ Any other (write in)
  [   ]

B) Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups
- ○ White and Black Caribbean
- ○ White and Black African
- ○ White and Asian
- ○ Any other (write in)
  [   ]

C) Asian/ Asian British
- ○ Indian
- ○ Pakistani
- ○ Bangladeshi
- ○ Chinese
- ○ Any other (write in)
  [   ]

D) Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British
- ○ African
- ○ Caribbean
- ○ Any other (write in)
  [   ]

E) Other ethnic group
- ○ Arab
- ○ Any other (write in)
  [   ]

Q4): Birth place

Where were you born?
- ○ UK
- ○ Other country (write in)
  [   ]

Q5): Country/province of residence

Q6): Locality of residence type

Q7): UK county of residence

Q8): Parental qualifications

Cardiff University

What is the highest qualification level you have achieved?
- Please <u>tick</u> the highest qualification you have or its equivalent (if known)

- ○ **Level 8**: NVQ Level 5, Doctoral Degree (PhD), Level 8 Advanced Professional Diploma/Certificate/Award; highly specialised Diploma from a professional body (e.g. teaching, nursing or accountancy)
- ○ **Level 7**: Higher Degree (MA, MSc, MSci, PGCE, PGCert, PGDip), Advanced Professional Diploma/Certificate/Award, City & Guilds Membership, Cambridge ESOL Delat
- ○ **Level 6**: Degee (BA, BSc), Advanced GNVQ, City and Guilds Gratuateship, UEL Level Three, Graduate Diploma/ Certificate
- ○ **Level 5**: HND, HNC, Level 5 Professional Diploma/Certificate/Award, Foundation degree, Diploma of Higher Education, UEL Level 2
- ○ **Level 4**: NVQ Level 4, Certificate of Higher Education, City & Guilds Licentiateship, Level 4 Professional Diploma, BTEC Higher Nationals
- ○ **Level 3**: NVQ Level 3, AS/A Levels/VCEs, Intermediate GNVQ, City and Guilds Craft, BTEC National Award Diploma, Certificate, OCR Nationals, CACHE Diploma, RSA Diploma, Access to Higher Education Diploma
- ○ **Level 2**: NVQ Level 2, 5+ O levels(passes)/CSEs (grade 1)/GCSEs (grades A*-C), School Certificate, First Diploma, CACHE certificate, Foundation Apprenticeships
- ○ **Level 1**: NVQ Level 1, Foundation GNVQ, Basic Skills
- ○ **Entry level**: 1-4 O levels/CSEs/GCSEs (any grades), Entry Level, Foundation Diploma
- ○ No qualifications
- ○ Foreign qualifications
- ○ Other UK qualifications

0% ▭▭▭ 100%

<< >>

Q9): Parent/carer home-educated

Cardiff University

Were you ever home-educated for any length of time?
- ○ Yes
- ○ No

0% ▭▭▭ 100%

<< >>

Q10): Current employment status of respondent

Q11): Current/previous occupational group of respondent

Q11): Importance of religion

Q12): Religious affiliation

Q13): Cohabitation

Q14): Spouse/partner country of origin

Q15): Spouse/partner employment

Q16): Spouse/partner occupational group

Q17): Number of children

Q18): Children characteristics and schooling

Q20): Other/mixed schooling

Q21): Future achievements for children

Q22): Home-education rationales introduction

Q23): Influential factors for home-education

Q24): Other factors for home-education

Q25): The decision to home-educate

Q26): Primary home-educator

Q27): Length of home-education

Q28): Influential approaches, philosophies & methods I

Q29): Influential approaches, philosophies & methods II
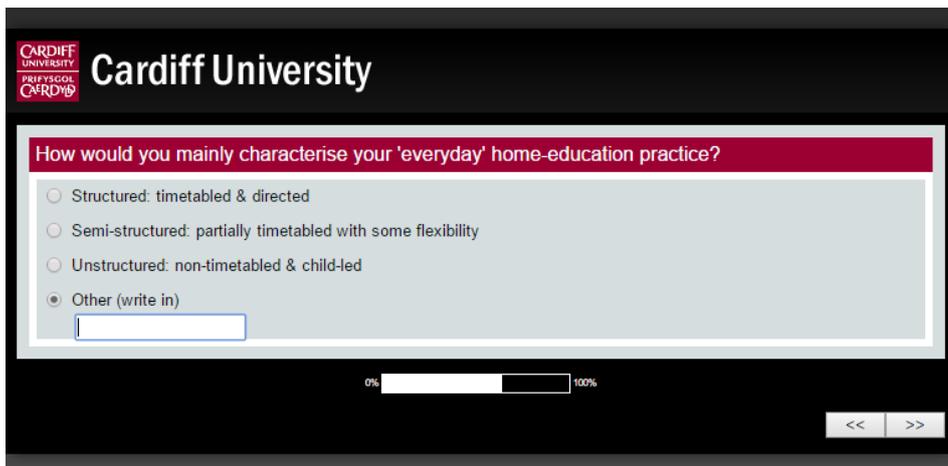
Q30): New technologies introduction I
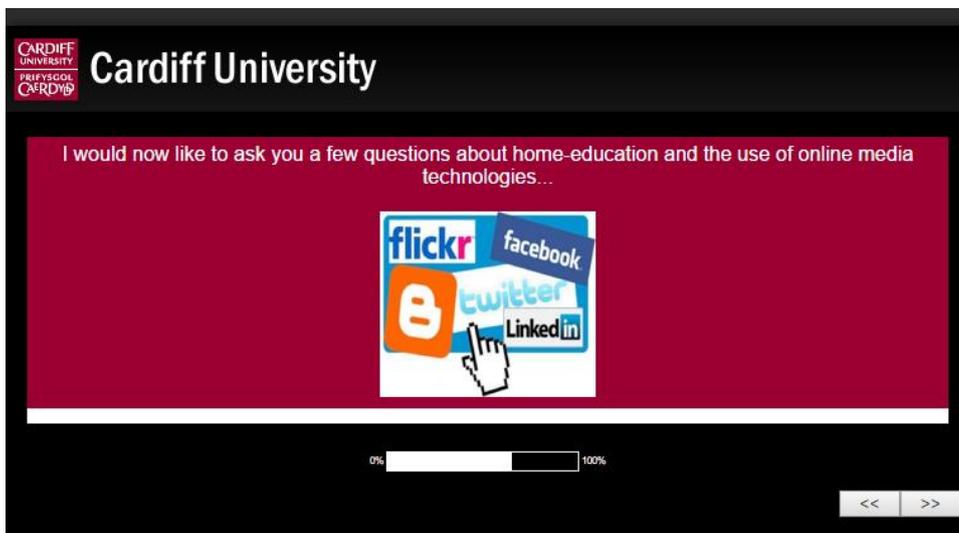
Q31): New technologies introduction II

Q32): Online moderator role

Q33): Family new technologies use I

Q34): Family new technology use II

Q35): Family technology use III

Q36): New technology use importance

Q37): Experiences of home-educating

Q38): Contact with Local Authority

Q39): Satisfaction with Local Authority provision

Q40): Home-education organisations membership

Q41): Importance of home-education groups

Q42): Prevalence of home-education

Q43): Acceptance of home-education

Q44): Representations of home-education

Q45): Reflections on home-education

Q46): Further participation

Q47): Further participation query

11.2 Appendix 2: Online moderator interview design

1) How did you come to be involved with the forum?

2) How would you describe your role?

3) What issues or topics do members discuss online?

4) What kinds of information do members exchange online?

    4. i.e. Video, visual, text based?

5) Where do forum members communicate with each other?

    a. i.e. online/offline?

6) How would you describe the group's previous and current activity levels?

    a. How frequently to members contribute?

    b. Who contributes i.e. a few members or evenly spread?

7) How would you describe the group's previous and current membership levels?

    5. i.e. surge in membership, steading increase decrease/ decline etc.

8) How would you describe the 'ethos' of the forum?

    6. i.e. welcoming, friendly, supportive etc.

9) Why is the forum 'membership only'?

10) Do you think members perceive the forum as a public or private space?

    a. What are the implications of this?

11) In what ways do you think members value the medium of the online forum itself?

    a. How is the forum different from other online media technologies?

    b. What does the forum offer in comparison to offline social networking?

12) How would you describe the home-educators who join online forums?

    a. What are their rationales for home-education?

    b. What are their home-schooling practices?

13) How do you think members of the public see home-education?

      7. i.e. stereotypes etc.

14) How do you think newspapers depict home-education?

      8. i.e. home- educators, the home-schooled, families etc.

15) How do LEA's and other Government officials see home-education?

16) What are your own thoughts on home-education?

17) Does the practice have benefits and/or drawbacks to it?

18) What are your experiences of home-education? i.e. have you practiced/considered it

19) What role do you think online forums will have for home-education in the future?

20) Do you have any questions/further comments?

11.3 Appendix 3: Families, parents & children interview design

Questions for home-educators/parents:

1. How did you and your family come to home-educate?

2. How would you describe your approach to home-education?

    - Influential philosophies, methods etc.?

3. How would you describe your practice?

4. How have you come to home-educate in this way?

5. What might a 'typical' week of home-education involve for the members of your family?

    - **i.e. what did you do last week?**

6. How would you usually go about organising/ planning this week?

    - i.e. how do you meet friends, organise events?

7. What kinds of educational resources do you currently use?

    - **Where do find these resources/ideas?**

    - **How do you decide which ones to use?**

8. How would you describe your role as a home-educator?

9. How would you describe the way/s your child/children learn?

10. What has home-education meant for your children?

11. What do you think it will mean for them in the future?

12. What has home-education meant for you as a family?

    9. **Changes to family etc.?**

13. How does your family socialise with others?

14. How do your children socialise with others?

15. What do you use online media technologies for?

16. What devices do you use to access online media technologies?

    - How many does your family have?

    - Where are they usually used in the home?

17. In what ways do you use online media technologies for home-education?

18. What does the use of these technologies mean for your 'every-day 'practice?

19. What do online media technologies mean to you as a home-educator?

20. How would you describe your families' use of online media technologies?

21. What role do you think online media technologies play for home-education today?

22. What do you think this means for home-education as a practice?

23. What role do you think online media technologies will have for home-education in the future?

24. How do you think the media portrays home-education?

25. How do you think non home-educators perceive home-education?

26. How do you think Local Authority's and/or Government officials represent home-education?

27. What have you found to be the greatest pleasures and challenges of home-educating?

Questions for young children:

1. Can you tell me what home-education is please?

2. Why do you think you are home-educated?

3. What do children do when they are home-educated?

4. What do you like about being home-educated?

5. What things do you dislike about being home-educated?

6. How do home-educated children learn things?

    - What are you learning about at the moment?

7. Who are your friends?

8. What are your friends like?

9. When do you usually visit/play with them?

10. Why do you play with them?

11. What games do you play?

12. Do you have a computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone at home?

13. What do you use it/them for?

    - Do you email/send messages to your friends online?

Questions for older children:

1. Why are you home-educated?

2. How would you describe your home-education?

3. What might a 'typical' week of home-education involve for you?

    - i.e. what did you do last week?

4. How would you describe the ways in which you learn?

- activities, process etc.

5. What does home-education mean to you?

6. What do other children who go to school think about home-education?

7. What do other people who don't home-educate think of it?

8. When do you usually meet with or visit your friends?

9. How would you describe your friends?

10. What do you and your friends usually do together?

11. Do you have a computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone?

   10.What do you use these devices for?

12. How do you use these devices for your home-education?

13. Do you use social networking like Facebook, or Twitter?

   - What do you use it for?

14. Do you use any other online media technologies like online gaming, Skype, YouTube or Instagram?

15. What do these online media technologies mean to you?

16. What do you find most difficult about being home-educated?

17. What do you most enjoy about being home-educated?

11.4 Appendix 4: Home-educated young people interview design

18. Why are you home-educated?

19. How would you describe your home-education?

20. What might a 'typical' week of home-education involve for you?

    - i.e. what did you do last week?

21. How would you describe the ways in which you learn?

    11.activities, process etc.

22. What does home-education mean to you?

23. What do other children who go to school think about home-education?

24. What do other people who don't home-educate think of it?

25. When do you usually meet with or visit your friends?

26. How would you describe your friends?

27. What do you and your friends usually do together?

28. Do you have a computer, laptop, tablet or mobile phone?

    - What do you use these devices for?

29. How do you use these devices for your home-education?

30. Do you use social networking like Facebook, or Twitter?

    - What do you use it for?

31. Do you use any other online media technologies like online gaming, Skype, YouTube or Instagram?

32. What do these online media technologies mean to you?

33. What do you find most difficult about being home-educated?

34. What do you most enjoy about being home-educated?

11.5 Appendix 5: Consent forms for online moderators

Email correspondence

 Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a PhD student at Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences (Please see my bio page: http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/postgraduateresearchers/amber-fensham-overview.html). I am currently undertaking a project entitled 'Exploring the role of online networks on the reconfiguration of Home-education' which aims to develop what is known about home-education in the UK. In particular, it seeks to find out the nature and purpose of online networks for contemporary practices.

Would you please be able to help me with any of the following?

1.) As part of this study, I would like to invite home-educators currently practicing in the UK to participate in an anonymous online survey about their experiences, opinions and use of online media technologies. Please see a **preview version** of the survey here: https://socsi.eu.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8q3Q5MwXFtJQtOR. Pending your approval, I was wondering if you could help me by emailing or posting a link to this survey to the members of this group please?

- If this is possible, may I please send you a 'live link' to the survey (different from the one above) for circulation?

2.) I would also like to hear the views, experiences and thoughts of online moderators/list owners/group convenors on this topic.

-If you are interested, could I please email you an 'information sheet' about participating in this research?

Thank you kindly for your help and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Ms Amber Fensham.

[personal details omitted]

………………………………………………………………………………………………

Dear: _____

Thank you very much for recently responding to my survey 'UK Home-education: researching rationales, practices and the role of online networks'.

I would like to invite you to participate in a Skype or telephone interview to discuss some of the topics covered in the survey and to also talk about your experiences as an online moderator/list owner/group administrator in greater depth. Please see the attached document for further information. We can arrange to chat on a day and at a time most convenient to you- I know home-educators are busy people.

The variety of forums and social networking groups for UK Home-education may be as diverse as the population of home-educators themselves. Representing this diversity is important for what is known academically about home-education in the UK and for challenging what has been assumed about the practice in the past- which is why your participation in this research would be greatly valued.

If you'd like any further information about the project or if you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

Amber

……

Information sheet

Cardiff University

1-3 Museum Place

Cardiff

CF10 3BT

[personal detailes omitted]

UK Home-education:

Researching rationales, practices and the use of online media technologies

<u>Participant Information Sheet</u>

Information sheet for online forum moderators/list owners/ group convenors

You are being invited to take part in this research.

<u>About the project</u>

The research is part of a PhD project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council at Cardiff University and has been approved the School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee. The

project is interested in expanding and developing what is currently known about home-education in the UK. In particular, it seeks to find out about the nature and purpose of the online 'forum space' for its members and what this might mean for home-education.

Who is being invited to participate?

- Any individual/s who currently moderates and/or convenes a one or more Yahoo! and/or Facebook groups set up to support UK based home-education.

What will it involve?

I would like to talk to you to hear your views, experiences and thoughts on the purpose and nature of online forums for home-schooling. The interview will last between 30 minutes to an hour.

Where will the research take place?

The research will happen at a time and place convenient to you. If it is easiest, we could chat online via Skype or telephone. Alternatively, we could meet face-to-face at a convenient location decided together. The interview can be organised as soon as you have given your consent to participate in the research.

Will the things you say be kept private?

The interview will be strictly confidential. This means that you will not be named or identifiable in any way.

What will I do with the information?

If we speak face-to-face or via Skype, with your permission I will audio-record our conversation so that I have a record of what was said. If we speak over the telephone, with your permission, I will take notes during our conversation. Alternatively, if we chat over email, with your permission I will store the information exchanged. The interview data will be stored securely, in strict accordance with the Data Protection Act. I will be the only person who is able to access this information. The interview will be used for my PhD and may also be published in academic journals. Interview material will not be used for any other purpose and will remain confidential.

What happens if I change my mind about taking part?

Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary. If you change your mind at any time you can withdraw without having to give a reason. You can also email, write or call me at any time to let me know if you no longer wish to be involved in the research study.

Who am I?

My name is Amber Fensham and I am a PhD student at Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences. I currently use online social networks for many aspects of my daily life. Although I have not been home-educated myself, some of my friends have and I would really like to hear your thoughts on this topic.

Contact Information:

If you have questions or need any further information please contact me via email, telephone or post using the details printed at the top of page 1. Please also indicate on the consent form if you wish to receive a summary of the research findings.

……

UK Home-education:

Researching rationales, practices and the use of online media technologies

<u>**CONSENT FORM:**</u>

Please read the following statements and sign bellow to confirm that you **agree to participate in an interview** conducted by Ms Amber Fensham, Department of Social Sciences, Cardiff University.

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for this study. I have been given enough time to consider my participation and have had the opportunity to ask any questions that I may have, and that these questions have been answered satisfactorily.

2. I consent to the interview being taped using a digital recording device. I understand that I will be offered a summary of the research findings.

3. I understand that anonymous extracts transcribed from our discussion in the interview will be used for a PhD thesis and for any future academic papers, presentations and/or publications.

4. I understand that my participation in the research is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw at any point.

5. I agree to take part in this study

<u>* Please sign electronically or by hand and return this form via post or email using the contact details printed at the top of page 1</u>

Name of Participant (please print)_____

Date_____ Signature_____

I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please circle): YES/ NO

Name of Researcher (please print)_____

Date_____Signature_____

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Best regards,

Ms Amber Fensham

……….

11.6 Appendix 6: Consent form for parents, children & young people

Cardiff University

1-3 Museum Place

Cardiff

CF10 3BT

UK Home-education:

Researching rationales, practices and the role of online networks

Participant Information Sheet

Information sheet for parents/carers who home-educate and their families

You are being invited to take part in this research.

About the project

The research is part of a PhD project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council at Cardiff University. The project is interested in expanding and developing what is currently known about home-education in the UK. In particular, it seeks to find out how the use of online media technologies features within the contemporary educational practices and everyday lives of home-educating families. Understanding the role and purpose of online networks in this way is important for up-dating assumptions that have been made about home-education in the past.

Who is being invited to participate?

- **Families who currently practice home-education in the UK**

What will it involve?

- **I would like to speak to you and your family to discuss your views, experiences and thoughts on this topic**

Where will the research take place?

The research will happen at a time and place convenient to participants. If it is easier for you, I could visit your home, or if preferred, we could meet at a more convenient place decided together. The interview can be organised as soon as you have given your consent to participate in the research.

Will the things you say be kept private?

- **The interview will be strictly confidential. This means that you and your family will not be named or identifiable in any way.**

What will I do with the information?

With your permission, I will audio-record our conversation so that I have a record of what was said. The interview data will be stored securely, in strict accordance with the Data Protection Act. I will be the only person who is able to access this information.

Anonymised extracts from the interview will be used for a PhD and in other academic journals, findings and reports. Interview material will not be used for any other purpose and will remain confidential.

What happens if I change my mind about taking part?

Your participation in the research is entirely voluntary. If you and/or your family change your mind, you can withdraw at any time without giving a reason. You can also email, write or call me at any time to let me know if you and/or family no longer wish to be involved in the research study.

Who am I?

- **My name is Amber Fensham and I am a PhD student at Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences. You can view my Cardiff University research profile online at: ***(details omitted)*****

Contact Information:

- **If you have questions or need any further information please contact me via email, telephone or post using the details printed at the top of page 1.**

This research has been approved by the School of Social Sciences Ethics Research Committee at Cardiff University. The researcher (Amber Fensham) currently holds an enhanced CRB clearance

UK Home-education:

Researching rationales, practices and the role of online networks

<u>CONSENT FORM:</u>

Please read the following statements and sign bellow to confirm that you and your family **agree to participate in an interview** conducted by Ms Amber Fensham, School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University.

On behalf of myself and my family:

6. **I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for this study. I have been given enough time to consider my participation and have had the opportunity to ask any questions that I may have, and that these questions have been answered satisfactorily.**

7. **I consent to the interview being taped using a digital recording device. I understand that I will be offered a summary of the research findings.**

8. **I understand that anonymous extracts transcribed from our discussion in the interview will be used for a PhD thesis and for any future academic papers, presentations and/or publications.**

9. **I understand that my participation in the research is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw at any point.**

10. **I agree to take part in this study (please circle): WITH/WITHOUT the participation of my family**

<u>* Please sign electronically or by hand and return this form via post or email using the contact details printed at the top of page 1</u>

Name of Participant (please print)_____

Date_____ Signature_____

I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please circle): YES/ NO

Name of Researcher (please print)_____

Date_____Signature_____

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Best regards,

Ms Amber Fensham

11.7 Appendix 7: Information sheet and business card for Summerfest

UK Home-education:
Researching rationales, practices and the role of online networks

About the project

The research is part of a PhD project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council at Cardiff University. The project is interested in expanding and developing what is currently known about home-education in the UK. In particular, it seeks to find out how the use of online media technologies features within the contemporary educational practices and everyday lives of home-educating families.

Understanding the place, use and purpose of online networks in this way is important for up-dating how home-education has previously been portrayed.

What?

I would like to speak to families who currently home educate in the UK to discuss your views, experiences and thoughts on this topic.

Where?

I will be observing and participating in various workshops and activities during ▇▇▇▇ from Thursday the ▇▇▇▇ 2013.

Contact:

Mobile: ▇▇▇▇
Work t▇▇▇▇
Email: fenshamaj@cardiff.ac.uk

Cardiff School of Social Sciences,
1-3 Museum Place
Cardiff
CF10 3BT

Amber Fensham
PhD Student,
Cardiff University

How?

If you would like to take part, please speak to me in person if you see me (I will be wearing a name badge). Alternatively, please text or call me to arrange to meet at a ▇▇▇▇ area most convenient to you and your family.

Standard Business Cards: Front side

UK Home-education:
Researching rationales, practices and the role of online networks

Amber Fensham
PhD Student

Cardiff School of Social Sciences
1-3 Museum Place
Cardiff
CF10 3BT

Email: FenshamAJ@cardiff.ac.uk
Work Tel: (02920) 74436
Mobile: ▇▇▇▇

Standard Business Cards: Reverse side

I will be attending ▇▇▇▇

For further information about my PhD project, please see the poster displayed on the noticeboard at the information stand or visit: http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsi/contactsandpeople/postgraduateresearchers/amber-fensham-overview.html

If you have any questions or comments please don't hesitate to text, call, email or write to me.

11.8 Appendix 8: Push and pull factors

Pre-emptive decision-making

Towards home-education… Pull factors	Away from school… Push factors
The role of education • The desire to positively tailor a child's education to suit their needs • Wanting children to value and enjoy education; • The belief that children should be free to follow their own interests /self- select what they learn • The belief that children should not be instructed what to learn • The desire to incorporate play into learning; **Learning** • Home-education will mean learning is instinctive and naturally occur through experience. Which is how it should be. • experience is a more effective method of learning • Home-education allows a child greater freedom to develop and pursue their own educational interests • The belief that learning is instinctive and natural and it, therefore, its healthier to let them peruse their own interests • The belief that children should be allowed learn at their own pace / self-directed **Education, family, and community** • **Education** should be at the **heart of a community; e**mbedded in meeting people of all ages and abilities etc. • The desire for children to spend more time outside in a natural environment; spending time with animals, in the woods • **Learning and socialising** from the base of a strong family unit as vitally important to the well-being and social and emotional development of the child. • The belief that the best place for a child is in the home amongst their family and the community **Cultivating independent learners and critical thinkers** • The desire to foster independent and self-motivated learners	**Pedagogy in schools** • Chronological year group as rigid • School starting age: The age at which children are expected to start school (age 5 in England, Wales and Scotland) as too young • School days are too long • Class size as too large • Streaming- 'summer babies' are at a disadvantage **Curriculum** • Constraint on subject choice • Focus on breadth not depth • Prescribed pace and pattern of instruction as restrictive • The majority of content covered in national curriculum as inefficient and irrelevant for equipping children with the knowledge and skills needed for the labor market **Teaching** • Teaching to test rather than to educate • The role of teachers as instructors in disrespectful to the individuality of children as unique individuals • The belief that their children would be labeled as disruptive by teachers **Exams** • The focus on STATS and exams as detrimental to a child's enjoyment of education • The academic pressure placed on children as unnecessary **Learning** • Schooling as stifling towards creativity and love for learning • Children are spoon-fed rather than becoming independent learners **Socialisation and the social environment in school** • The belief that primary socialisation amongst a large group of peers is detrimental to a child's social development

- The desire for a child to achieve the best they possibly can
- Desire to foster a love of learning
- To utilise curricular which would enable children to think to evaluate evidence and argument to reach an informed judgment
- Being able to adapt to child's needs
- Wanting children to be educated within the local community among friends of all ages To equip children with the skills they need to carve a chosen career

The 'self' and identity
- Desire for a child to be confident, honest and a happy individual
- The desire for children to possess the qualities of resourcefulness and adaptability
- The desire for children to acquire positive values and to be good people
- To raise strong, ethical adults who are tolerant of difference
- The desire for children to be free from coercion

Political/ ideological
- To extend children's ability to think critically;
- Desire for a child to think independently and not do what the state says
- To raise individuals who are free from the constraints of societal expectations

Childhood
- The desire to provide a childhood where children are respected and have the opportunity to explore the world at their own pace
- Wanting to provide children with a full and enriching childhood

Family
- The desire to spend more time with children before they grew up
- The belief that parents should have a greater stake in their child's education than schools allow
- Wanting to get to know each other as a family
- Developing a close bond as family

Lifestyle
- Wanting the ability to live a full, freer life
- The desire to home-educate for a more relaxed way of life

- The lack of social interaction amongst year groups as unhealthy
- The belief that attending school would detrimentally affect their child's psychological process of bonding and attachment to the family

The physical environment of the classroom
- The classroom as a restrictive environment within which to learn

Political/ideological beliefs towards 'the system.'
- General distrust in the system
- Schools brainwash children
- Schools as institutionalizing children to make them conform to arbitrary rules

Experiences of being a teacher
- The belief that children are manipulated and coerced by the school system
- That belief that the needs of students are a secondary rather than primary consideration
- Witnessing the damage that school does to children under the guise of education
- Streaming: Summer born babies are disproportionately represented in lower ability groups and are therefore already at a statistical advantage
- Dismayed at the lack of self-esteem students possessed, the negative attitudes that peer behavior fostered towards learning

Beliefs and attitudes towards the general school model:
- 'One size does not fit all': school as a homogenous model which does not suit all children
- Schools as an ineffective model by which to be educated
- School modeled like a business; head teachers as managers and teachers losing their voices,
- Lack of parental autonomy

• Wanting children to experience life, rather than to read about in textbooks	
Religious belief • Wanting to teach children the word of god	• The underlying belief that that God lead the family to Home-education

Reactive decision-making

Away from school… Pull factors	Towards home-education… Push Factors
Lack of provision for individual needs • Failing to meet the educational needs of gifted and talented children • Unsuitability of SEN school for child' academic abilities • A child with severe learning difficulties taught in cloakroom **Childs' educational and social development while attending school** • Disinterested in learning • Failing to meet academic targets and performance expectations • Child unchallenged by the national curriculum **Social environment** • Bullying by staff and peers **Deteriorating mental health** • Depression & other mental health conditions • Self- harm • Suicidal tendencies • Child exhibiting anxieties before, during and/or after attending school **Special educational needs** • ADHD, ADD, Autism, Asperger's, Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, sensory processing problems **Health conditions and risk** • Cystic Fibrosis – classroom damaging to physical health – pick up infections more easily **Emotional well-being** • Becoming withdrawn from the family • Increase in general unhappiness, chronic fatigue, and stress • Not enjoying life	**To alleviate and rehabilitate** • To provide relief from the emotional and/or educational pressures of school • To rehabilitate a child by providing a supportive and loving environment within which they are unconditionally accepted **To restore** • To restore a child's, self- confidence and happiness and independence • To restore a child's interest and motivation for learning **To compensate** • Wanting to give the best for each child as their needs; • The desire to 'make up' for the negative experience of school and/or lack of provision by offering a safer alternative **To mitigate the risks of academic failure** • Home-education as the 'only' option to manage the continued risks based on child's experiences of school

• Not being able to cope in school • Child developing emotional instabilities and unpredictable behaviour **School places** • Unable to obtain school place at desired school	