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Schooling vs Home Education: Implications in Measuring Success in Home Education in The United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to address the current limitations of measuring success in Home Education. Educational achievements in schools are measured through standard knowledge-based assessments which take place during various stages in a child's formal education, based on the National Curriculum. However, due to the unique purpose, aims and methods used by Home Educators, current measurements and standards are incompatible with achievements identified by Home Educating families.

The established traditional concepts of educational success are the framework of current measurement of educational achievements, which may be contrary to the concepts of families who follow different philosophical understandings of education. The reality of each family having their individual aims and purpose of Home Education has resulted in their achievements to be immeasurable by the traditional standards as used in schools.

This paper aims to argue that it is necessary to review current philosophical and theoretical concepts in education, apart from knowledge-based education as set out by the state in the National Curriculum. This will allow us to develop new common grounds in measurement of educational success inclusive of individual achievements set out by Home Educators.

1. Introduction

1.1. The History of Home Education in the United Kingdom

Home Education, as an alternative to schooling, is on the rise in the United Kingdom. Although it currently seems to be a rising phenomenon, it actually may be considered a reappearing concept. Historically Home Education was reserved for upper class families who considered mainstream schools mostly suited for children from lower class citizens (Davies 2015). Education for the masses had a different purpose than education for children from the ruling class. In the 18th century the philosopher John Locke had a very low opinion and distrust of schools. The mainstream schooling system taught English to "illiterate vulgar" children, to his mind. On the other hand, in order to develop into a gentleman one needed Latin, French, history, geography and science (Tate 2015). Tutors and parents were considered to be more able than school to induce a child into a mental state ready for learning, through their manipulations of the learning environment. In the 18th century elite families engaged in Home Education, started to select professionals as tutors for subjects they themselves could not teach. Eventually, in the 19th century, courses were developed for mothers on how to educate their children (Davies 2015). Later in the century, many parents whose children did attend school, felt less involved and became distanced from their children's education (Meighan 1988). Most illiterate parents simply spectated as their

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children became educated. Over time, however, the majority of parents had received a basic form of formal education, and school became the norm. It was the 1944 Education Act that is generally recognised to have played a major factor in the change in society to recognise educational provision only in an institutional setting and the concomitant decrease in Home Education. As a consequence in the 21st century, education has strongly been associated and frequently interpreted as "schooling" (Davies 2015). Today, Home Educating parents may disagree with this association as the aims and purposes of Schooling (Education at school) and Home Education vary significantly.

1.2. Current Home Education in United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom the Education act states that education is the responsiblity of the parent. According to the Education Act 1966:

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable –

(a) to his age, ability and aptitude, and

(b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise. (Education Act, 1996: section 7)

Hence, it is a parental choice to either send a child to school or to provide education `otherwise'.

Current Home Educators have either never sent their children to school, or have withdrawn their child from school at some point. If a child has never been to school it is likely the child not to be known to the Local Authority which results in non-monitoring and no guidance or support from the Local Authority.

If a parent decided to Home Educate while a child was registered at a school, the parent would have to give the school a written notice of withdrawal of the child, which initiates contact between the Local Authority and the parents. Henceforth, the child's educational provision is the parent's responsiblity. The Local Authority may enquire on the education provided by the parents and their educational philosophy, but only intervene if they think the child is at risk of educational/emotional/any other neglect. The law does not require to monitor or inspect or test the education provided at home after withdrawal from the school system (Davies 2015). This lack of control and acurate data on Home Educating families, may have resulted the increased negative association with Home Education that has been circulated through various media outlets.

2. Aims of Education

The purpose of a system of public education is to graduate good citizens who have the necessary skills demanded in the marketplace and the capacity to enjoy contemporary society, as cited in Davies (2015). However, with the fast-changing technology it has been argued whether this ideology is even still valid. The current skills demanded by the industry ask for creativity and innovation, rather than basic literacy and numeracy. Bass (1997) argues that the purpose of education is the perpetuation of society (even when it changes) with its core values intact. This leads to the question whether the purpose of Home Education is compatible with the purpose of schooling.

2.1. Purpose of Schooling and Home Education

The historical debate regarding the purpose and aim of education is never-ending. Philosophers since Socrates and Pluto have questioned the purpose of education (Tate 2015) and will undoubtedly continue to. Tate (2015) names a number of educational philosophers who have influenced the western perception of the purpose of education. His work illustrates the contrasts of viewpoints over history which all can be related and may even be

implemented currently. Aristotle maintained that all citizens belonged to the state and therefore education was the responsibility of the state and not the family. Therefore, education was to be seen as a state's duty. However, education was not universal and citizens had to be distinguished between those who ruled and who had to be ruled. Children themselves were seen by Aristotle as citizens who could not make decisions on behalf of themselves. As a consequence it was a state's duty to look after them as the state sees fit. Tate moves on to the work of Rousseau who had a significant influence on western educational pedagogical theorists like Steiner and Montessori (Stevens 2001, Oldfield 2012). His work "Emille" centred the child in the midst of the aim of education and from here various methods have been developed instead of moulding the child to any educational system (Stevens 2001, Tate 2015).

John Holt continued in this mind-set and believed autonomous learning is best and more natural for children. He started as a teacher within Northern American, trying to improve the American school system. Nevertheless, gradually realised that school and education would not have the same outcome, subsequently became a strong advocate for "unschooling" or autonomous learning (Illich 1970, Holt 1982). Holt became a strong critic of "schooling" and like Illich, argued that schooling can be very damaging to the development of the child. The purpose of education, they believe, cannot be to 'school' children. Much evidence in qualitative research shows that Home Educating parents support this pedagogical ideology in the United Kingdom (Meighan 1995, Webb 1999, Fortune-Wood 2000, Rothermel 2000, Rothermel 2011, Ray 2013). Although research indicates the motives for Home Education may vary immensely from one family to another, or even one child to another (Neuman and Guterman 2016), it has been frequently evident that the parents who have had children in school and chose to withdraw them is due to a deficit in the education available for their children in schools (Webb 2009 , Rothermel 2011, Davies 2015). This deficit represents the opposing views on the purpose of education of the state and the parents.

The role and purpose of education provided by the state is often not in line with those of families choosing to Home Educate. The concepts and methods of mainstream education are not identical in Home Education (Galen and Pitman 1991).

There have been numerous case studies which highlight the parental philosophical motives for opting to Home Educate (Mullarney 1983, Stevens 2001, Anon 2005 , Janice Aurini and Davies 2005 , Rothermel 2011, Neuman and Guterman 2016). Home educators whose children have experienced school may have different motives from those whose children have never been to school. However, their perspectives about the role and purpose of education while at Home may not be as diverse. In order to commit to Home Education, parents share the strong belief that they can do better than what is currently provided by the state (Spiegler 2010).

2.2. Current Measurements of Education

Case studies and other forms of qualitative research show the effectiveness and success of Home Education in the United States. It has been claimed and widely accepted in academic journals that Home educated children outperform their "schooled" peers in literacy and maths assessment. (Meighan 1995, Ray 2013). These assessments are used in schools to measure the pupil's progress or as examinations. The critique of this claim could be that the participants in such research are merely a selected sub-group from the many Home Educated children. The families that would consent for their children to be assessed and their performance to be graded for comparison between them and other schooled peers are not necessarily representative. These parents are most likely to be parents who motivate their children academically and the children would be familiar with and comfortable about being put in learning conditions similar to school (Arora 2003). Hence such research that shows

Home Educated children to be outperforming their peers academically may not be completely impartial. In order to judge or measure educational success the role and purpose of the education provided at home must be taken into consideration.

Other research has also shown that in addition to academic advancement, Home Educated children also score higher in self-esteem and being more active in the community (Basham 2001, Ray 2013). The reason that Home Educated children appear to do better because they have had an education which gave them a sound and solid academic skills and confident social and emotional structure. The formation of bonds between child and parent allowed development of academic, social and emotional and intellectual. Moreoever it seems that adopting a ahild-centred method, fulfils the child‘s interest and has better impact on their development (Ray 2004).

However, these assessments would evaluate Home Educated children using school measurements. Hence to assume both schooled and Home Educated children would have a similar outcome or could be comparable to each other is unfair and inaccurate. Furthermore, both Pattison and Rothermel agree that the success of Home Education cannot be measured using concepts of successful “schooling” (Rothermel 2011, Pattison 2015).

“*It is possible therefore that homeschooled students are [actually] at a disadvantage being measured with instruments that are aimed at the knowledge, values, skills and behaviour state-school students are supposed to learn, interpret internalize and exhibit*” (Ray 2013) p329.

Home Education methods vary from one family to another, from complete autonomous and unstructured, through child-led, or semi-structured to structured. Watson argues Home Educated children can and should therefore only represent themselves and are not comparable with their school peers (Watson 2018). Hence using the national curriculum as the basis of the suitability of education by local authority (Monk 2004), would seem inappropriate and subjective.

3. Conclusion

In light of the hindrance of finding an appropriate way of measurement for the success of Home Education, it is necessary to review how success in education is measured and to develop new philosophical and theoretical concepts that would be inclusive of the purpose and approaches of Home Education alongside those of schooling (Thomas and Pattison 2013).

As Home Education includes more than just subjects and regards the well-being of a child as part of their educational journey, the standardised tests have little meaning for Home Educators other than something to fall back on. Moreover, not all families follow the National Curriculum or adopt schooling at home. As such, to expect Home Educated children to reach the key milestones set out in National Curriculum or to compare children’s achievements based on that, is not only unreasonable but also discriminatory.

If we perceive education as an achievable end goal, other interpretations of education would not fall within these boundaries. Moreover, if we can’t have a common interpretation of education in which other forms or alternative aims and methods can co-exist, we may never achieve education in the first place.

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