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INTRODUCTION

Home education 1750–1900: domestic pedagogies in England and Wales in historical perspective

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Since the seventeenth century a growing body of advice literature, educational treatises and policy has been encouraging parents to play an active part in the education and instruction of their children (Fletcher, 2008, pp. 37–52; Grant, 2013, pp. 115–119). The focus of historians of education, however, has been on institutional instruction and the role of government in education. Consequently, we still know relatively little about the history of education beyond the school walls, but new research on the history of the book, on Enlightenment educational philosophy, and on the history of parenthood, has revealed the significance of domestic instruction among middle and upper class families in the late eighteenth century (Bailey, 2012; Grenby, 2011; Hilton, Styles, & Watson, 1997; Hilton & Shefrin, 2009). At the same time, research on literacy has suggested the importance of home learning for the children of the working classes in the nineteenth century (Rose, 2002; Vincent, 1981). Current research also draws attention to the role of home and family in education, noting the impact that family culture can have on educational outcomes (Dearden, Sibieta, & Sylva, 2011; Hart & Risley, 1995). And, the number of children being educated primarily at home is growing, rising in the UK from about 20 families in 1977 to 80,000 families in 2009 (Badman, 2009).

This Special Issue builds on the new historical research, and responds to the contemporary interest in the educational work of home and family.[1] Its six historical papers enable a better understanding of the history of home education, both as a philosophy and as a practice. The contributors approach this history from a range of perspectives. They draw on evidence from fiction, from book history, from advice literature, from prison records, memoirs, letters and diaries, to offer studies which shed new light on home education in Britain from 1750 to 1900. They reveal shifts in conceptions of the educational function of the home over time, and uncover varying ways in which domestic pedagogical strategies have been

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implemented. In the process, these studies demonstrate the continuing importance of the education offered at home even as institutional provision was expanding in the nineteenth century. They also call into question a tendency to over-emphasise the distinction between learning in the home and institutional instruction. As the final paper by Richard Davies suggests, together these articles illuminate a history that suggests new ways to think about current concerns and practice.

This Introduction sets the historical papers in context, considers the ways in which home education might be defined and interpreted, and highlights commonalities which merit further historical investigation. In his concluding commentary, Davies approaches the historical case-studies from the perspective of a philosopher and contemporary practitioner of Elective Home Education (EHE). He draws out common themes more fully and raises issues of particular relevance to home education today.

Focusing on the period 1750–1900 offers insights into ideas of domestic instruction that were particularly influential and enduring. While the nineteenth century saw the gradual expansion of school provision in England and Wales, and the professionalisation of teaching, this process was slower and more complex than in France, Germany or the USA (Green, 1990; Muller, Ringer, & Simon, 1987; Sutherland, 1990). It was not until the Forster Act in 1870 that anything like a nation-wide system of elementary schooling was established. And yet, literacy rates were as high as 60% in 1833, well before then (Vincent, 1989, p. 54). Similarly, while there were efforts in the 1860s and 1870s to rationalise the distribution of secondary institutions, it was not until 1902 that secondary schooling was systematically provided and funded (Sutherland, 1990, p. 152). Such figures testify to the longevity of a vital educational culture that did not depend on formal schooling. Instead, differing ideas and practices of home education competed with, co-existed with and complemented institutional instruction throughout the period, making the history of home education in England and Wales a particularly fruitful subject to explore.

The late eighteenth century saw the proliferation of treatises advocating the education of children in the home and promoting the role of parents in instruction. From the 1760s, theorists influenced by Rousseau began to develop new progressive pedagogies which emphasised child-centred learning and questioned the value of what was taught in schools (Cohen, 2009; Woodley, 2009a). At the same time, the influence of new ideas of sociability, the perceived failings of contemporary schools, and later the development of a distinctively British middle class conception of the home as a source of virtue, gave rise to the view that domestic instruction was far preferable to education at school for both boys and girls (Cohen, 2004; Davidoff & Hall, 2002, pp. 149–197; Woodley, 2009a). The papers here by Michèle Cohen on the pedagogy of conversation in the late eighteenth century, by Matthew Grenby on children's literature in the home during 1750–1850, and by Katie Halsey on domestic instruction in Romantic fiction, all shed new light on this key moment, which prompted the development of pedagogical approaches that made a virtue of their domestic origins.

Such ideas and pedagogies were principally directed towards and consumed by the middle and upper classes, who had the luxury of choice in determining how their children should be educated. However, even as the virtues of private education were being trumpeted, some were acknowledging that institutional education might be necessary or even have advantages. Prominent novelists used their fictions to explore the wider implications of domestic education for the position of women in society, itself seen as an indicator of the health of the wider nation (Halsey, this issue). Arguments about the need for an education that would shape national character undermined those in favour of the individual and intimate approach promoted by home educators (Cohen, 2004, p. 19). A growing number of voices began to argue that school education was necessary—particularly for boys, who needed to leave the feminine domestic world and in order to achieve manly independence (Tosh, 1999, pp. 110–115). Changing conceptions of the place of women in society also called into question the appropriateness of home education for girls (Halsey, this issue). At the same time, shifting patterns of sociability, and new conceptions of the way knowledge should be shared, further devalorised domestic instruction (Cohen, this issue). The professionalisation of teaching and the specialisation of knowledge and research also had an impact (Bellaigue, 2001; Rothblatt, 1968, 1976).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, those arguing in favour of home education for the elite were a minority. At the same time, the perception that families of the middle and working classes were inadequate to the task of educating their children was prompting greater intervention by the state (Crone, this issue; Musgrove, 1959, pp. 175–176; Woodley, 2009b, pp. 119–147). The home was losing its legitimacy as a source of knowledge and instruction. Christina de Bellaigue's paper on the popular home educationist Charlotte Mason demonstrates, however, that even at the end of the century, in the context of patchy institutional provision, significant numbers were still receiving much of their education in the home. In the same period, parents and educationists continued to express interest in the ideas of the late eighteenth-century theorists who had first argued in favour of domestic instruction, prompting some elite parents to seek alternatives to the dominant public school model of schooling.

For many families lower down the social scale, however, the question of choice was moot. Papers here by Rosalind Crone on modes of learning in the working class home in the nineteenth century, and by Gillian Sutherland, on self-education in the lower middle class at the turn of the nineteenth century, suggest that those with fewer resources needed to make the most of what was available. From the 1780s, growing numbers of working class children were attending privately-established working class schools and the institutions established by religious organisations. By 1850, there were two million children attending Sunday schools (Gardner, 1984; Laqueur, 1976, p. 44). Whatever arguments might be made in favour of domestic education, such numbers suggest that working class families were keen to use schools where they were available; and evidence from prison records suggests that those whose literate skills were most developed had usually

acquired them in schools (Crone, this issue). By the late nineteenth century, mass schooling was established and, as Sutherland notes, 'it became increasingly difficult to find many who had had no encounter at all with formal provision' (Sutherland, this issue). However, this did not preclude educational activities in the home. Instead, Crone's work suggests that the home was becoming more, rather than less, important in the provision of occupational instruction. Similarly, the late nineteenth century saw large-scale engagement in efforts for self-improvement of the kind explored by Sutherland. By 1906, there were 13,052 members of the National Home Reading Union (Snape, 2002, p. 103). While such movements might not have conformed to the ideals of late eighteenth-century educational theorists, they demonstrate the continuing use of the home as an educational space even as professional educators were asserting the importance of trained teachers and specialised sites for instruction.

As this rapid overview intimates, the definition of what constituted home education changed over the period. Even today, as Richard Davies notes, it is a difficult term to define (Davies, this issue). It functions as an umbrella phrase covering a very broad range of practices, from the politically charged notion of 'home-schooling'— which does not necessarily imply abstention from scholastic routines, that is most common among certain religious communities in the USA—to the commitment to autonomous learning implied by the notion of 'unschooling' and which has a counter-cultural connotation (Davies, this issue; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013, pp. 9–11). M. Gioria argues that attempts to define home education are counter-productive since 'there are as many reasons to educate at home as there are families who opt to do it' and notes that such definitional efforts imply a normative conception of education as schooling (quoted in Rothermel, 2011, p. 2009).[2] This conception, as the papers here reveal, is one that is historically specific and contingent. Indeed it was over the course of the period 1750–1900 that 'education' came to be seen as synonymous with 'schooling': that is with formal, specialised instruction in an institutional setting.

The contributors to this Special Issue have interpreted the term 'home education' broadly, partly in order to help uncover the historical process by which school education became established as the norm. The different papers thus reflect the diverse meanings of home education in the past as in the present, and also highlight the multiplicity of educational activities which took place in the home in the period 1750–1900. Paying attention to the specificity of terms used in different periods can be revealing. In the late eighteenth century, when an educational philosophy of home education was most clearly articulated, the term most commonly used was 'private education', meaning education conducted in the privacy of the home, rather than 'in public' at school. This was a value-laden phrase. Privacy then connoted domesticity, virtue, and a moral and serious approach to instruction and knowledge, in opposition to education in public, which connoted worldliness and superficiality, both of knowledge and of character. In the nineteenth century, the term 'home education' was more often used, and specifically deployed in contrast to 'school education', but the same period saw the emergence of the language of

'self-improvement' and 'self-education', terms which gave rise to many publications directed at the working class and lower middle class learners studied by Crone and Sutherland (Vincent, 1981, Part III). By the end of the nineteenth century, 'home education' was being deployed in multiple ways: simply to indicate that which was learned at home, more specifically to refer to the training of character and mind carried out in the home by parents, and also as a way to refer to the instruction of children in the 'home school-room'. What constituted 'home education' shifted continuously and varied according to context.

The boundaries and characteristics of 'home' were also mutable throughout the period; there might be little difference between the way children were taught at school and the way they were taught at home. Cohen and Bellaigue note that boys and girls taught at home might be subject to daily regimes and routines that echoed those adopted in schools. Similarly, schools might seek to model themselves on the home—this was particularly common in girls' schools, but the domestic character of English boys' schools was also something which struck foreign visitors. Even as schools expanded in the nineteenth century, efforts were made to preserve the perceived benefits of home education (Bellaigue, 2004, 2007). Grenby reveals the ways in which children's literature was produced for a market where the lines between home and school education were blurred, and the same texts might be considered appropriate for both (Grenby, this issue).

At the same time, the context in which the late eighteenth-century child received instruction at home might be very different to what twenty-first-century conceptions of home and family might imply. Grenby shows that William Godwin's children were incorporated into a rich multi-generational educational enterprise, which challenges modern conceptions of the distinction between public and private (Grenby, this issue). Moreover the boundary between home and school might be very porous, with parents seeking to shape the character of the education their children were offered at school (Grenby, this issue).

Examining ideas and practices of home education in the past, then, reveals that instruction offered from the home was not always viewed in opposition to that offered in schools. Rather, education at home often formed part of the varied education of children of all classes before mass and compulsory schooling was established. The historical analysis also underlines the ways in which scholastic and home instruction might interact, and calls into question any simple distinctions between home/domestic and institutional education in the past and today. As Sutherland and Davies suggest, rather than seeking to set up dichotomies between home and school and between formal and informal education, it may be more fruitful to think in terms of the individuals experiencing a range of educational environments and influences along a spectrum of formal to informal and which might blur the boundaries between home and school, rather than any singular 'education'. This re-conceptualisation of the range of educational experience might even help to break down the opposition between parental and professional conceptions of knowledge which dates back to the nineteenth century, and which continues to have damaging effects (Crozier, 1999).

The six historical papers also raise four key issues which need further study. The first concerns the extent to which the meaning and practice of home education has shifted with changing practices of family life and with demographic change. In the late eighteenth century, the importance of conversation to sociability, and the large size of elite households promoted a particular version of home education that emphasised intergenerational exchange, and friendship within the family (Cohen, this issue; Grenby, this issue). By the late nineteenth century, smaller family sizes, the ritualisation of family life, and the greater age-segregation of middle class homes—where children more often occupied specialised spaces apart from their parents and other adults—gave home education a different character (Gillis, 1996; Hamlett, 2010, pp. 112–114). The ways in which demography and the changing functions and practices of family life have shaped pedagogical practice in the home, and indeed outside the home, require deeper investigation.

The second issue concerns the question of agency in education. Both the architects of the familiar format studied by Cohen, and Charlotte Mason and her supporters, drew on Enlightenment theory to support the idea that children should have agency in their own learning. Crone and Sutherland highlight the ways in which, far from being the passive recipients of publicly-funded schooling, working class and lower middle class families developed complex educational strategies to make the most of the opportunities available to them, retaining some control over their educational trajectories. As Davies notes, to the extent that contemporary EHE practitioners share an educational outlook, it is that they all support some degree of autonomous learning by children—again this could be considered a question of protecting agency. More work is needed to track the intellectual history of this tradition and to consider the ways in which those espousing home education have contributed to pedagogical traditions seeking to privilege the agency of the individual in their own learning.

The third issue concerns gender and power. Throughout the period, it was principally mothers who took charge of the education of their children in the home. Cohen, Grenby and Bellaigue all reveal the seriousness with which many middle and upper class women undertook this task from the late eighteenth to the late nineteenth centuries, and the significant educational role of mothers has been demonstrated in several other studies (Crone, this issue; Humphries, 2010, p. 320; Shefrin, 2006). In the nineteenth century, the maternal responsibility for instruction gave women considerable cultural power in this period, giving rise to a female tradition of public moralism (Dabby, forthcoming; Hilton, 2007). One reason for the popularity of the PNEU was the way in which it conferred authority on mothers and legitimised their intellectual activity (Bellaigue, this issue). However, this division of labour also shored up traditional gender hierarchies, and the extent to which home education can be ‘a means of domesticating not children, but mothers’ is a subject which continues to be controversial in contemporary home education research (Davies, this issue; Kunzman & Gaither, 2013, pp. 14–15). At the same time, there were gendered dimensions to educational theory and practice, and it is clear that more girls than boys were being educated at home for the whole of this

period. The idea that women were best educated at home in preparation for domestic life had traction far longer than any idea that gentleman might best be taught at home, and it still influenced the curriculum and careers' guidance for girls into the twentieth century. Further analysis of the complex relationship between gender and home education is needed.

One final issue raised by the historical analysis is the narrowness of contemporary conceptions of education. As Crone notes, the domestic curriculum could be usefully defined to include 'learning to crawl or speak, developing an awareness and later knowledge of identity and community, and cultivating and expanding the imaginative faculties' (Crone, this issue; Vincent, 1997). Similarly, home education might be defined to include occupational training as well as more canonical learning. Sutherland's paper highlights the myriad ways in which, beyond the school, lower middle class women sought to expand their educational horizons, drawing on multiple resources—chapel meetings, public libraries etc.—in their efforts. And Charlotte Mason's conception of the educational work done by parents was broad, incorporating the training of habit and character, nutritional choices, physical education, as well as more conventional educational activities. These expansive definitions undermine the notion of education as synonymous with schooling and propose a more flexible and inclusive conception of instruction and learning. They support a sense of education as a much larger and lengthier project, ranging over a much wider gamut of activities and experiences. They also suggest ways in which we could begin to expand understandings of education today, and to recognise more fully and appreciate the educational work done by agencies beyond the school, and by parents of all classes and cultures.

Notes

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2. In this context, it is significant that one of the chief organs of home educators in the UK is 'Education Otherwise', which takes its name from a phrase in the 1944 Education Act. Similarly, an important new journal in the field is *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*.

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