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New Frontiers in Research and Practice on Homeschooling

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In 2000 and 2013, *The Peabody Journal of Education* published issues about homeschooling, providing a platform to deliberate on what was in 2000 a burgeoning movement in the United States and has now become a population estimated by the National Center on Education Statistics (NCES) to number between 3% to 4% of the school-age population (Snyder, de Brey, & Dillow, 2018).

There are also indications that home education is a growing global phenomenon. The recent *Wiley Handbook of Home Education* devoted an entire section to homeschooling practice worldwide (Gaither, 2017). Moreover, in the past 6 years three global conferences have been held on the subject, the most recent of which was held in Russia with over 1,000 participants. The conference included a research track yielding dozens of papers, several of which are included in this issue. Holding a conference about home education in Russia is itself an intriguing occurrence worthy of consideration in the context of geopolitical happenings. Since then, a new organization called the Global Home Education Exchange Counsel has formed (www.ghex.world) with a mission that includes supporting more and diverse research on home education.

In the 2000 and 2013 issues on homeschooling in this journal, supporters and critics alike drew upon political philosophy and legal thought to make normative arguments about the legitimacy of homeschooling or to debate how homeschooling and the policy environments under which the practice was regulated and exercised could benefit or harm not only individual students but also collective aspects of civic life. Researchers reviewed the literature to evaluate claims of the efficacy of homeschooling on academic achievement, postsecondary preparation, and socialization. The issue also explored the impact of home education on the education profession and education research.

Debates continue over topics such as how much state oversight over homeschooling is desired, whether homeschooled students are prepared for civic life, the extent to which homeschooling can be considered a human right, and the effects of homeschooling on academic outcomes. Discussions on these topics pervade academic papers, conferences, and the popular media. Despite the persistence of these perennial issues, much has changed. Homeschooling research and practice have evolved recently.

On the practice side, the composition of the homeschooling population, the reasons for homeschooling, and the way homeschooling is carried out have become increasingly diverse. Perceptions that homeschooling, from the point of its modern rapid growth in the early 1980s through the early 2000s, is primarily practiced by white families for religious reasons continue to endure and are borne out by some data (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013). But other data collected and released in the 2016 NCES survey indicate that now the most common reason parents homeschool is because of “concern about the environment in schools,” indicating that homeschooling is chosen for a variety of other reasons (McQuiggan, Megra, & Grady, 2017). For example, homeschooling is increasingly practiced by some black communities for ethnocentric reasons (Fields-Smith & Kisura, 2013). The NCES data also show growth of homeschooling in minority communities with Hispanic homeschoolers estimated at 26% of the population and black homeschooling families at 8%. Both numbers show significant growth from previous reports (Snyder et al., 2018). Families who have children with special needs are also increasingly electing to homeschool – a trend buoyed by the passage of

Education Savings Account programs in states like Arizona and Florida (Cheng et al., 2016; Butcher & Bedrick, 2013). And progressive unschoolers continue to seek out homeschooling for reasons pertaining to pedagogical philosophy (Gaither, 2009).

On the research side, the number of empirical studies of homeschooling have also proliferated over the past several years, and the methodological quality of this work, though still limited, has improved in concert (Cooper, Spielhagen, & Ricci, 2016; Gaither, 2017; Maranto & Bell, 2017). The *Peabody Journal of Education's* previous issues on homeschooling, in particular, mostly comprised reviews of research and theoretical arguments about homeschooling. Even among the few articles that represented original empirical research, a majority were qualitative or based upon small, nonrepresentative samples. The composition of these prior issues reflected the limited state of homeschooling research at the time (Kunzman & Gaither, 2013).

The difficulty of obtaining large, representative data on homeschoolers has forced researchers to rely on small convenience samples, prohibiting them from generalizing their conclusions to the broader population. An even more significant methodological limitation is the inability of researchers to account for selection into homeschooling. Researchers have not used experimental and quasi-experimental methods, precluding them from making causal claims about homeschooling. In the 2013 issue, this was a central point articulated by many scholars (Lubienski, Pukett, & Brewer, 2013).

Concerns about many pieces of homeschooling research are well-founded. Yet with data collection efforts like the United States Department of Education's National Household Education Survey, the National Study of Youth and Religion, or the Cardus Education Survey, scholars have made strides in collecting data representative of homeschool populations (Cheng et al., 2016; Hill & Den Dulk, 2013; Isenberg, 2007; Van Pelt, Sikkink, Pennings, & Seel, 2012) with consequent improvements in internal and external validity. The use of econometric techniques or quasi-experimental methods on these richer data sets have also been more frequently used to study homeschooling, enabling researchers to be slightly more, albeit not completely, confident about making causal claims (Bhatt, 2014).

The following collection of articles highlights the change that homeschooling practice and research has undergone. It features unique populations of homeschoolers and the way they practice homeschooling. Although there is still much more room for improvement, it is often helpful to pause and take stock of how the field has progressed over time.

Jeffrey Dill and Mary Elliot lead this issue with their findings from over 60 interviews of homeschooling families across the United States. Their sample represents the growing diversity of homeschoolers – from progressive unschoolers to conservative Christians. Probing the thinking of these families and drawing from Hannah Arendt's philosophical work, Dill and Elliot argue that homeschooling as practiced by these families is an exercise of a private voice that may contribute to the public good by sustaining political diversity.

In the subsequent article, Lisa Puga documents the experiences of black homeschooling families in Philadelphia. Building on the work of Fields-Smith and Kisura (2013) in Atlanta and Washington, D.C., Puga traces these families' motives to homeschool as well as what the practice means to them. Puga draws upon the voices of not only homeschooling parents but also their children to describe how homeschooling might be seen as a form of political protest for these communities.

Is there a connection between the increase of homeschooling and the expansion of school choice policy, such as charter schools or programs that provide subsidies for families to attend private schools (e.g., private-school vouchers, tuition-tax credits, and education savings accounts)? In *Peabody's* prior issues on homeschooling, Johnson (2013) and Lines (2000) explored the partnerships between homeschooling families and local district-run and charter schools. In this issue, Eric Wearne describes a new population of homeschooling families, *hybrid homeschoolers*, whose students spend a portion of their week in brick-and-mortar charter schools. Wearne presents findings from a survey to document the families' demographic characteristics, what they value in education, how they made schooling decisions for their children, and their experiences in prior schooling arrangements. This research provides insight into innovation within the homeschooling and broader

school communities, showcasing a willingness to mix modalities and methods in order to achieve educational objectives.

In the fourth article of this issue, Daniel Hamlin uses the National Household Education Survey, a nationally representative sample of U.S. households, to examine the acquisition of cultural capital among homeschooled children. Hamlin shows how unique data sets or new methodological approaches can address limitations of prior research with respect to internal and external validity. His article also touches on an often-repeated concern that homeschoolers lack social opportunities. Hamlin's exploration is a fresh take on this question, which has been raised in the 2000 and 2013 special issues of this journal (Medlin, 2000, 2013).

One of two international contributors, Philippe Bongrand of the University of Cergy-Pontoise in France, uses rare population-level data of homeschooling communities in several French municipalities in a pilot study. Because French law requires that homeschoolers undergo a registration process with the state, Bongrand was able to use government records to explore a variety of empirical questions about homeschooling. Bongrand and Hamlin demonstrate the potential to ask and answer important questions about homeschooling and to use representative data in new ways.

Corey DeAngelis and Angela Dills use longitudinal data and quasi-experimental fixed-effects methods to investigate how the prevalence of homeschooling interacts with the passage and implementation of school choice policies. Presumably, changes in access to charter schools, private-school vouchers, tuition-tax credits, and education savings accounts affect a family's decision to homeschool. DeAngelis and Dills's quantitative methods are a welcome addition to the body of homeschooling research, demonstrating the potential for other researchers to use these methods on existing data to ask and answer salient questions in more methodologically rigorous ways.

The issue concludes with an analysis of the Romeike family case. The Romeike family were granted asylum by an immigration judge in 2010 because of how they were treated in Germany for homeschooling their children. Although, the ruling was overturned on appeal, the Obama administration did not deport the family, and they remain in the United States. Phillip Oh applies Jocelyn Maclure and Charles Taylor's philosophical framework regarding liberal-pluralist and republican forms of secularism to discuss how considerations about freedom of conscience might bear upon debates about the legal status of homeschooling. Although this article is not the final say on this debate, it provides a fresh framework for thinking through this complex issue.

We hope this body of work showcases the evolution of the homeschooling phenomena and will push scholars to ask new questions and use better data or methods to answer questions about homeschooling communities of practice. Undoubtedly, homeschooling will continue to grow and evolve. We look forward to seeing how this research will inform the shared discourse about homeschooling among the scholarly community, policymakers, families, and the broader public.

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Albert Cheng is an assistant professor in the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas and senior fellow at Cardus. He teaches courses on the history and philosophy of education and education policy. His research interests include character formation and faith-based schooling.

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