Home education: then and now

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Elective Home Education is a legal, minority approach to the compulsory education of children. I review the potential contribution of the historical analysis of 'domestic pedagogies', presented in this Special Issue, for home education practice in the UK. By drawing on narratives of a period at the cusp of the perceived normalcy of 'schooling', I consider an alternative discourse to articulate the purpose of, and approaches to, education. In particular, I focus on the family not only as the site for educational practices, but also as critical for our understanding of what constitutes a 'suitable education'. Along the way, I show how distinctions, common in home education practice, illuminate the historical debates on 'domestic education'. I conclude by suggesting we cannot disassociate discussions of a suitable home education from the family within which such an education occurs.

Keywords: *home education; homeschooling; family; MacIntyre; educational aims; pedagogy*

For most children, education begins, and develops, within the home. Where it does not we consider it a tragedy. In modern industrial societies this usually runs contemporaneously with a period of compulsory *schooling*. An increased period of compulsory, state-funded education is seen as an indicator of national development (for example, by the OECD). Late nineteenth-century England saw a number of acts of parliament which consolidated both state-funded and private schooling (see Gillard, 2011). The result was a largely universal system of elementary education, extended to secondary level in the iconic 1944 Education Act. The period 1750–1900 thus represents a period in which England moved from sporadic opportunities for education outside the home to a situation in which '… it became increasingly difficult to find many who had had no encounter at all with formal provision' (Sutherland, this issue).

In the twenty-first century, the ubiquity of schooling is so pervasive in contemporary society that in many places 'education' has become synonymous with 'schooling', and the role of parents reduced to that specified by home–school contacts (see DfE, 2013). Yet, even a superficial review of home life shows the variety

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of ways in which children learn from their everyday practices, and how vital these are to living a reasonable life.

At the same time, for a small proportion of children today—about 80,000 in the UK—the home provides a central place for their education (Badman, 2009). Elective Home Education (EHE), legal in the UK, occurs when parents take direct responsibility for all aspects of their children's education. The majority of these children do not attend school, although about 400 'flexi-schoolers' will attend school part-time. It is the education of these *EHE children* which is the focus of this paper, though it is worth noticing at the outset that they differ in many ways from those children who, historically, experienced a 'domestic education'.

As a philosopher and EHE practitioner, my approach is to consider the implications of the papers in this Special Issue for contemporary EHE. This paper comprises both an explicit commentary on, and a substantive argument grounded in, the historical studies in this Special Issue. It develops a deeper understanding of contemporary home education practices alongside a review and critique of the previous papers. This is a two-fold undertaking. The first task is to interrogate the papers through highlighting conceptual distinctions familiar in EHE and informal education discourses; the second is to interrogate present practices in the light of the narratives presented.

I begin by reviewing the landscape of EHE in the UK. I then consider the various historically situated analyses presented in this Special Issue, before developing two key themes for consideration by contemporary EHE practitioners (usually parents) and researchers.

I. Home education: now

The post-war education settlement, enshrined in the 1944 Education Act and reiterated in the 1996 Education Act, requires that:

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, p. 7)

EHE falls under the 'or otherwise' provision of the Acts. A parent is entitled to provide a 'suitable education' without undue interference from the state. What is to count as a 'suitable education' remains unclear (see Davies, 2015). Present case law, reflecting the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989, Article 29), holds that a suitable education:

> … 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. (Woolf, 1985)

Such a wide definition means that children who are 'home educated' or 'flexi-schooled' represent a diverse group with different educational experiences, and that EHE practitioners articulate many different reasons for choosing to home educate (see Morton, 2010). (It is worth noting that, given the difficulty in identifying the EHE population, there are inevitable sampling issues in UK-based empirical studies.) Simply stated, the only element these parents necessarily have in common is that they have decided to home educate their children as opposed to relinquishing that responsibility to the school. Research suggests moreover that EHE practitioners' objectives change over time: EHE practitioners are on a journey in which their understanding of education and the home develops, and becomes more complex (see Thomas, 1998). Their relationship with schooling also becomes more complex, with many home educated children entering formal education as external examinations become significant.

Having pointed to the diversity of EHE practitioners, it is worth noting some broad trends. Some EHE researchers have sought to identify 'autonomous learning' or 'natural learning' as at the heart of authentic EHE practices (see Thomas, 1998). Whilst there may be some evidence for this as a preference among EHE practitioners, this does not preclude the use of formal curricula to structure home education. So, autonomous learning advocates would emphasise the centrality of children's exploration, play and learning in the context of the everyday. According to this approach, children develop their own interests and these are to be 'cultivated' and supported. Other families seek to provide a coherent curriculum either through online programmes, for example, the ACE programme (see www.acemi nistries.com/homeschool), or one individually tailored to their children. For all groups, however, some autonomous learning is important and this tends to be the focus when groups of EHE practitioners and their children meet together.

It is worth noting a distinction between those EHE practitioners who chose to home educate because they see it as a preferable option regardless of the quality of local schools, and those who chose to do so because of some deficit in the local provision (see Morton, 2010). These deficits include such issues as bullying, or failure to respond to special needs. Whilst the first group choose to home educate on grounds of particular conceptions of the family, the latter group are often choosing based on circumstances not of their own making, in particular, the perceived failure of the school to adequately respond to the parents' concerns.

As I noted earlier, EHE is not a coherent movement as such, but defined negatively, in that the children, of compulsory 'school' age, are not full-time school attendees. In being defined, politically, against the school, EHE is often considered in the light of the perceived normalcy of the school and school-based discourses about education. In such discourses the idea of 'natural' play-based learning is seen as an idealised, romantic view of childhood incompatible with the educational needs of citizens in a post-industrial society. Both this view, however, and that of a laissez faire account of autonomous learning can be challenged if we adopt a general view of 'a suitable education' (see Davies, 2015). In that analysis, any particular approach to the education of children can only be justified in so far as it

contributes to the child's ability to live a 'good life', rather than by measuring it against an ideal of childhood or the perceived needs of citizens. The critical question is how one specifies the good life, and what abilities, dispositions, knowledge, etc. are necessary to pursue it (see Davies (2003) for a consideration of these latter issues).

As Sutherland (this issue) points out, the period leading up to 1900 represents the last period when children's education was not dominated by a view of education embedded in the discourse of the school. In contemporary policy and public debate, however, the school, and discourses which relate specifically to the school, are taken to be *the* discourse about the education of children. Alternative forms of education which reject such discourses are perceived with suspicion. EHE practitioners today operate in different legal, political and social contexts to parents of the period 1750–1900. Considering a period when school education was less normative may, however, offer new insights for contemporary EHE, just as examining the historical examples through this lens may shed new light on domestic pedagogy in the period before 1900. My approach is, therefore, to seek general themes and resonances between the historical analysis and contemporary EHE practice; I begin with a more general review of the Special Issue as a whole.

II. Domestic pedagogies: then

It is clear from the papers in this Special Issue that the theme of 'domestic pedagogy' is a wide-ranging one. This collection is diverse in terms of the objects of study, methodological approaches and historical period. As a non-historian, EHE practitioner and philosopher of education, I am concerned with the 'resonances' of the historical analysis of the previous papers with contemporary practices of home education. Shortly, I will explore a number of specific connections between *past* and *present*, but first I will broadly review the historical narratives, framing them in terms of 'domestic' and 'pedagogy'. In part I want to set out some of the different interpretations of these key terms which are used within this Special Issue, but also to offer a synthesis of this historical diversity with which to direct my own argument. Following this I draw on the accounts, especially the analysis of Charlotte Mason (de Bellaigue) and the Godwin–Wollstonecraft household (Halsey, Grenby), as well as earlier work (Davies, 2013a, 2015) to develop an account of 'education as upbringing'.

Domestic

In contemporary EHE practice, it is rare to hear reference to 'domestic education', rather the term of 'home' is preferred. Yet there does seem to be more at stake than mere changing usage. As well as underlining the materiality of the house, the *domus*, the term 'domestic' also draws attention to a range of household relationships. In the past, such relationships included those between family members, as

well as—in the elite families reflected in many of the papers in this issue— the family's retinue of staff. The 'domestic' revealed in the historical analyses is a structured, semi-public microcosm reflecting the particular character of middle- and upper-class lifestyles of the period. By contrast, the use of 'home' in contemporary home education and homeschooling conjures up a sense of being 'part of', so one feels 'homesick' or 'home is where the heart is', and as such it differs from the materiality of a dwelling place, however permanent. The difference between 'domestic' and 'home' is not simply a matter of changing usage, but reflects shifting models towards a more nuclear family and the kinds of values, including a distrust of a public sphere dominated by the state, that underpin some EHE practitioners' rejection of the school (see for example, Taylor's (1989) account of the shifting conception of the family).

'Domestic' is concerned with both the materiality of house and home, and with a particular institutional arrangement articulated in terms of expected roles and duties. For girls of the eighteenth century especially the household was not only the site of their education, but its purpose. Commenting on Eliza Heywood's 'Alderman Saving', Halsey notes:

> His comments reflect his belief that a woman's proper role is to manage her household … and a dislike of women's increasing involvement in the public sphere. Such sentiments were not unusual. (Halsey, this issue)

Although such an account looks *inward*, as Grenby points out 'Godwin's private household itself functioned as a semi-public schoolroom' (Grenby, this issue) with visitors joining in 'the families educational practices'. In relation to education, in elite families particularly, domestic education looked *outwards*; quoting Carlson, Grenby argues that Godwin saw family '"as a public-oriented relation" and "home as a sphere of enquiry among familiars"' (Grenby, this issue). Such a 'public, pedagogical family' (Grenby, this issue) is reflected in the new children's literature Grenby discusses. Thus, we can mark out a concern with both the 'outward' and the 'inward' approaches to education; distinguishing a *domestic education* from a *domesticating education*. This distinction was often at the heart of debates in the eighteenth century. Halsey (this issue) notes a concern with 'the relative value of a public or private education … and … the proper occupations for women'. There is both an expectation, and emerging critique, that a domestic education is particularly appropriate for girls, whilst boys will in time attend a school. At least part of the difficulty is the perceived inadequacy of public schools in general, for both boys and girls: dangers, moral and intellectual, lurked in the public school.

Thus, in the late eighteenth century, elite families undertook their 'domestic education' at the intersection of the public and the private. The educators were themselves educated and content in the public domain. Many of these women were, as Cohen (this issue) argues, confident pedagogues and able to make available for publication their own teaching resources. At the same time, the fictional, conduct literature and non-fictional accounts continually underlined tensions between the possible dangers (often intellectual dangers) to girls of receiving all

their education at home, and the possible, moral and reputational, dangers of attending school. Whilst Moll Flanders' story highlighted the fact that 'even the domestic hearth and home may be rendered unsafe by education' (Halsey, this issue), schooling offered a variety of snares. The moral dangers attributed to schools, whether real or imagined, reflected the perceived safety of the parental gaze, and girls' lack of 'worldliness'—valued in itself—which made them vulnerable to the advances of unscrupulous men and the infectious vanities of their peers. Thus, schools opened girls up to, as Gisbourne warned, the 'pernicious society of those who are not so well principled as themselves' (Halsey, this issue), and the various licentious vices hinted at in Halsey's first illustration (see Halsey, this issue, Figure 1).

These perceived intellectual dangers, the acquisition of various 'surface accomplishments' of dubious worth (see Halsey, this issue), reflected perhaps, the influence of broader social movements. MacIntyre (1985) has discussed more fully the processes by which a society's ethical and political certainties are fragmented and called into question. The first movement he identifies is a decline in a communally agreed discourse about the purpose of human life, and especially a purpose which is tied to one's position within society. In the late eighteenth century, the view that children were being prepared to occupy the social positions of their parents was, at least for elite families, beginning to be disputed. Thus, 'the vigour of the debate surrounding female education was at least partly generated by uncertainty and fears over changing norms and standards of female behaviour' (Halsey, this issue). A girl's purpose in life was no longer simply to marry a suitable man. Rather, educational thinkers, such as Wollstonecraft and Edgeworth (see Grenby, this issue) in their different ways were articulating a more complex account of the development of valuable dispositions, skills and abilities. The second movement identified by MacIntyre (1987) is the rapidly increasing body of knowledge which precludes the possibility of it being known and understood by a single mind. From the late eighteenth century, it was increasingly felt that a well-rounded education needed a number of educators (as in a school) rather than one's parents. Elite families sought to respond in other ways, through the use of private tutors, for example, but even elementary education was deemed to be demanding. The late nineteenth–century 'Mothers Education Course' required students to develop not only a knowledge of how to educate, but also the increasingly complex content of that education (see de Bellaigue, this issue).

Gender also intersected with class. For some young women the rise of schools offered the possibility of pursuing higher status, white-collar jobs. These women, from less well-off households, with due diligence in school and in post-school education, had the opportunity to take up positions as school teachers or clerks. *Public* schooling offered an *alternative* to following their mothers; a means of escaping domesticity, although the work was particularly demanding, especially during early training (see Sutherland, this issue). Interestingly, the less well-documented education of the working class seems to reflect the most static situation, in which children reproduced the social lives of their parents and families. There was little

gendered difference in the rates of education at home and at school, and most children received a mixture of both. Boys tended to follow the job profiles of their parents and following school were apprenticed to their fathers, or close male relatives (see Crone, this issue). Girls similarly appeared to follow mothers into domesticity and domestic service. The dilemmas, in terms of school attendance for working-class families, were more related to religious affiliation or availability of schools than to concerns about the appropriateness of school or home education.

It was in elite families then that the dilemma of *schooling* was most pertinent. In such families, an *outwardly facing* domestic education utilised the resources of the home, family and wider community (friends, mutual societies, etc.) to enable children (and young adults) to develop, as Wollstonecraft put it, as 'free, rational and virtuous'. There remained the possibility for education to be shared between parents and suitable teachers in schools, though a number of the papers in this issue reflect the tension in such arrangements (see, for example, Grenby, this issue; Halsey, this issue). In the same period, an *internally facing* domestic education remained less clear about the advantages of a wide educational aspiration, but rather was disposed to protect the child, especially girls, in the home (see Cohen, this issue).

But a *domesticating education* could be as problematic for the educator as much as the child. The implication for the mother is perhaps best illuminated in a letter to the *Parents' Review*. Here, 'Mater' admitted being ground down by the demands of running a home, educating the children and playing the expected wider role in society, all without an entourage of servants (de Bellaigue, this issue). The response of the readers and editors of the *Review* was practical, but it neglected the political aspect; it (simply) required better self and household management from 'Mater' herself. This is a matter which cannot be ignored in relation to contemporary home education, where mothers are usually still the primary educators.

Pedagogy

So far I have been following the terminology of many of the papers in referring to domestic 'education' rather than 'pedagogy'. Drawing now on Hamilton (1999), and with reference to the other papers in this Special Issue, I distinguish between several uses of the term 'pedagogy'.

Historically, 'pedagogy' has been used in relation to three distinct approaches to education: the role of the pedagogue; the analysis of methods of instruction; and an analysis of education as a political practice. According to Hamilton (1999) the dominant use of the term during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was to describe the analysis of methods of instruction, which reflected the emergence of mass schooling. However, the *original* pedagogue of the classical era, often a slave, had particular responsibility for the moral development of the child. In order to learn to *be* virtuous one needed, first, to *act* virtuously. The role of the pedagogue was to provide direction as to what virtue demanded of this child, given their status,

in a particular situation. The role was not limited to particular times or places, rather the child learnt from the modelling of the pedagogue in everyday situations (see Davies, 2003). This was also a long-term relationship, as the pedagogue would provide support to the child as they prepared for, and continued, their more formal education. MacIntyre (1999) articulates something similar as the primary educative role of all parents and this reflects experiences of many home educators, especially those in the 'autonomous learning' tradition (see Thomas & Pattison, 2007). This approach emphasises a 'being with' your child and that learning *emerges* from responding to, and seeing others respond to, everyday experiences.

The emergence of a perceived need to improve the efficiency of distinctively educational practices saw a separation of the content of educational practices from the methods employed to support children's learning. The latter aspect became the focus of 'pedagogy' as a distinct area of study. As Hamilton (1999) notes, this both challenged the previously held belief that content and method of instruction were necessarily linked, and focussed attention on what teachers *did* rather than what pupils *learnt*. It also led to the possibility of seeing education as a technical or mechanical process turning 'raw materials' (i.e. children) into young adults with the required knowledge, skills and dispositions, using universally available methods. Thus, the preparation of teachers in Sutherland's account (this issue) displays the importance of the correct technique. Charlotte Mason's desire to open a college for women to learn how to be mothers equally emphasises the need for knowledge about how to perform this role. She argued that 'mothers must master a "science of education" and direct the instruction of their children accordingly' (de Bellaigue, this issue). (At the same time, however, as will be discussed below, Mason's use of ideas from, for example, Pestalozzi, tempers this technicist account of education (see Biesta, Allan, and Edwards (2014) for a review of the educational research and the science of education).)

The third use of the term, emerging in the twentieth century, is in relation to 'critical pedagogies' which seeks to reunite content and method, as well as place educational practices explicitly within political and politicised discourses. Critical pedagogies, as Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2009, p. 2) note:

> … loosely evolved out of the yearning to give shape and coherence to the theoretical landscape of radical principles, beliefs and practices that contributed to an emancipatory idea of democratic schooling.

As well as concerns with democratic forms of schooling, critical pedagogies have tended to focus on the reproduction of power relations, the truly humanising potential of education, and especially the silencing of marginalised groups with schooling. Darder et al. (2009), whilst locating the emergence of critical pedagogies from the 1930s onwards, nevertheless identify educational theorists, such as Dewey, as offering the foundations for its emergence. Mason's identification with a tradition of education drawing on Pestalozzi and Froebel also places her in one of the foundational traditions of critical pedagogy, and it is also perhaps not too farfetched to see progressive figures, such as Wollstonecraft and Godwin, as in the vanguard of such

approaches. Certainly Charlotte Mason's influence on the homeschooling move-
ment, which often situates itself in distinctively critical pedagogical tradition, is
indicative (for example, https://simplycharlottemason.com/).

In general terms, it is clear that when discussing 'pedagogy' one needs to be clear
about the object under scrutiny. In the case of domestic pedagogies, and home
education, particular issues become critical: are we concerned with the activity of the
pedagogue, or particular techniques of instruction, and if so, what different
approaches to instruction? To what extent do the debates concern, primarily, politi-
cal and social issues, beyond questions of learning and child development? For
example, in recent years, in the UK, discourse about EHE has become increasingly
politicised, through a number of reports and consultations, perhaps the most notori-
ous being the Badman Review (Badman, 2009) which argued that there needed to
be greater state involvement in EHE (see Lees (2014) for an analysis). The recom-
mendations have not been implemented following a change in government.

III. Towards illumination: a few distinctions

I have argued that the education of children, wherever it occurs and whoever is
supporting that education, is legitimate in so far as it contributes to the ability of
the child to live life well (see Davies, 2013a, 2013b, 2015). Developing a distinc-
tively Aristotelian account of the flourishing life underpins that argument. Yet it is
also possible to articulate a weaker claim to educational legitimacy, on the basis
that that life can be lived in better or worse ways, without specifying a substantive
general account of what makes a life better or worse. Education should contribute
to an increased likelihood of living a better life. Clearly education is not the only
element required to support a child; this more general task I identify as 'upbring-
ing'. Education, in its various forms, is part of upbringing and this general account
sits well with the present case law on EHE; namely that the child be prepared for
life in their community in such a way as not to foreclose their future options.

Such an account also sits well with the analysis of various forms of 'domestic
pedagogies' included in this issue. De Bellaigue's analysis of Charlotte Mason's phi-
losophy locates education within upbringing, and there are hints that Godwin,
More and Wollstonecraft equally saw education as intrinsically embedded in
enabling children to live 'better' lives. Crone indicates how significant the home
was for the development of those occupational skills necessary as a member of the
working class. In some cases this education took the form of children engaging in
'adult activities', for example Godwin's children's lectures where the children were
not to be 'treated as a child' (Grenby, this issue), or as a form of apprenticeship to
a parent or close relative, as was the case with working-class children. In some cases
this was a more formal introduction to what we might term 'subjects' or 'academic
disciplines', as when Godwin's son went to school; in other cases it was a form of
educational 'quest' about what was worth doing in life, as in the case of Ruth Slate
and Eva Slawson (see Sutherland, this issue). Accordingly, in this section I want to

explore two distinctions which are reflected in the papers; namely, the distinction between institutions and practices, and between formal and informal education. In conclusion I want to draw attention to two perennial questions in education: its purpose and what approaches are effective. I show that not only are they interconnected, but that the papers in this Special Issue offer useful resources in addressing these questions for EHE practitioners.

After noting that the 'new children's literature' was closely bound up with home education and that it valorised private education whilst demonising public schooling, Grenby (this issue) notes, however, that: 'the line between home and school education was often very blurred', 'the debate on public versus private education was not always as polarised as we might imagine'; he cites Edgeworth who argued that 'the "solid advantages" of school education must be "secured by previous domestic instruction"'.

Grenby also draws attention to Mary Wollstonecraft's aspiration for 'a middle ground between the inadequate pedagogy and supervision of boarding-schools and the confinement of an adult-dominated "private" education' (Grenby, this issue). Neither option was appealing, both the school and the family were seen to bring educational advantages. He argues that in fact the:

> … new children's literature served a hybrid private–public educational model than it did domestic education alone. (Grenby, this issue)

At the other end of the social spectrum Crone identifies the contribution of both schools and homes in providing an education for most working-class children.

Sutherland's analysis of the post-school educational exploits of women schoolteachers and clerks identifies the significant role of formal and informal educational establishments played in these biographies. As I noted previously, she comments that 'it became increasingly difficult to find many who had had no encounter at all with formal provision' (Sutherland, this issue). She goes on to say that '… the interesting questions [are] about the relationships between [school] and other educational experiences in individual lives' (Sutherland, this issue). Halsey also explores this territory through the medium of fictional representations of school and education, through which the writers of such 'conduct literature' engage in 'a vigorous and often heartfelt debate about female education' (Halsey, this issue). Attending to Moll Flander's education, she also notes that it could be seen 'as reflecting a broader ambivalence about the benefits of educating women at home' (Halsey, this issue) and the previously mentioned dangers of the hearth (Halsey, this issue). The issue is not simply about the potential of domestic education, but 'the relative value of a public or private education' (Halsey, this issue).

This raises a more basic problem in need of clarification, namely a distinction between *institutions* and *practices*. The school is a distinctively *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. Some of the debate in the preceding papers tends to collapse this distinction, as perhaps did their subjects.

This distinction helps to clarify the debate by identifying two distinct questions of contemporary significance: what is the purpose of education for children (the practice), and what are the best (institutional) arrangements to support people's learning? Sutherland helpfully develops this latter point in terms of a formal/informal distinction which focuses on not only the institution, but also the kinds of approaches to education which support learning. Sutherland asks:

> There has been a tendency … to construct a false dichotomy between formal and informal ways of learning, one which has increased in artificiality as the vogue for large schemes of mass schooling has grown in societies. … It is more helpful to see formal/informal as two poles …. (Sutherland, this issue)

Grenby also notes that '[p]ublic schooling … was often extremely informal, sourced on an *ad hoc* and intermittent basis …' (Grenby, this issue). A continuum model, in which educators position themselves between the informal and formal poles, seems more reflective of experiences than a strict dichotomy (see Jeffs & Smith, 1999). In practice, however, there are a number of dimensions which might be characterised as formal–informal. In addition to institutional arrangements, we could consider, for example, curriculum, adult–child relationships, learning spaces and lesson structure (as well as system structure, which is Grenby's point). It is possible to imagine educational practices which are located in different places on the continuum depending on which dimension of that practice we are focussing on. The autonomous learning advocates in home education will emphasise the need for informality in terms of curriculum and have a certain ambivalence on learning spaces as this will depend on the child. Other home educators follow a formal curriculum whilst using informal learning spaces. In both cases we can see similar levels of informal adult–child relationships. Equally, we do see schools following a loosely formal curriculum, using informal spaces, with formal relationships between adults and children (though rarely in the UK).

These histories of 'domestic pedagogies' show the variety of ways education is conducted with complex mixes of formality and informality. They also raise two key questions concerning the purpose and effective approaches for the education of children and, particularly in this paper, for EHE.

IV. Towards illumination: EHE

Purpose

That education ought to increase the likelihood of children living better lives seems uncontentious. The devil, as always, is in the detail. Working-class children in the nineteenth century required, minimally, the wherewithal to earn an income, and in

an increasingly literate society a basic level of 'the 3Rs'. For parents of working-class children there was more concern with the availability of resources than the purpose of education (as Crone indicates). For wealthy families in the period 1750–1900 the matter was not settled. Wollstonecraft's call for an education that promoted freedom, rationality and virtue was clear, but lacked the specificity required to inform educational activity. As a statement about the characteristics of a family, however, the ideas of Wollstonecraft (and Godwin) did begin to provide some narrative substantiation of the purpose of education. They expressed their aspirations for the children in terms of the kinds of people they aspired for them to be, and they expressed it in publically acceptable terms.

Educational purpose, in the contemporary discourses of schools, tends to be set out in terms of what children will be able to do, unrelated to their particularities, or often to any perceived future requirements. Often these purposes are set out in the form of universal 'learning outcomes', indicating what the child should know or be able to do. By contrast, for both the working-class and elite families in the past, the purpose of education was set out in terms of practices which were deemed valuable and were articulated *through* family life. It is probably inevitable that there was, and is, disagreement on the purpose of education; what marks out the historical debates as different from the twenty-first century debate is that, in the past, arguments about such purposes were *not* conducted in terms of decontextualised 'learning outcomes'. The particular visionary insight of Wollstonecraft was to articulate purpose in terms which would, within her social circle, gain widespread acceptance. It is not only that visitors to the Godwin–Wollstonecraft household appear to have engaged in educational activities, but that they were inspired by their value.

One of the difficulties for EHE is a perceived expectation that *educational purpose* must either be rejected, or articulated in terms reticent of the style of school 'learning outcomes'. What emerges from the historical accounts is an alternative formulation of education articulated in terms of substantive claims about the kinds of families within which upbringing occurs, and the aspirations parents have for their children. What is, of course, also necessary is that this family life can be characterised in acceptable ways, at least to those to the parents' social circle. In contemporary society this includes, in the language of case law, 'not foreclosing the child's options in later years'.

The Wollstonecraft–Godwin approach to domestic education could be interpreted in relation to EHE in the following way. A family that is well-functioning and outwardly facing, in terms of strong relationships with the broader community, expresses a particular view about how life ought to be lived. The purpose of education is to enable, and actively encouraged, the children to participate fully in the life of that family. In a society that values, as Western liberal democracies tend to, personal autonomy, a well-functioning family is one which lives out the tensions between personal freedoms and community life, and prepares the child to be able to make reasonable decisions about the kind of life they want to live. Where the child (ren) do attend school, this too is intended to support this educational narrative.

Approaches to EHE

The purpose of education does not, therefore, have to be set out in terms of 'learning outcomes'. Further, the institutional context of education is critical for both how it is conducted and how it is articulated; in this case either the family or the school. We see in Sutherland's analysis the ways in which the other institutions (friendships, chapel, literary groups, etc.) also give shape to specific approaches to education.

The formal–informal continuum is helpful in rejecting a dichotomy between informal and formal approaches to education. It is misleading, however, in two regards. The first, discussed earlier, is that it collapses the different dimensions one might be judging as formal–informal. The second is that it risks focussing attention on educational practices and ignoring the institutional characteristics within which education is occurring. Schools, especially, have a relatively universal, if phase specific, institutional structure and approach to education. Families on the other hand show a great deal of structural variation; they are unique expressions of particular sets of relationships. So, whilst there may be families similar to the Wollstonecraft–Godwin household in contemporary society, these are few, and will reflect the particular characteristics of the individuals in those families.

It is not surprising that EHE is expressed differently in different families, given that these families are themselves quite distinct, with a variety of ways in which they might be described on the formal–informal continuum. The choice between autonomous learning and more formal approaches is not a matter of 'pedagogy', understood as an analysis of methods, but of the particular beliefs a family has about itself, how children develop and how they are to be included in family life. The bias in EHE towards more autonomous forms of learning may not say so much about the 'naturalness' of such approaches, but the characteristics of families who can, and choose to, home educate. What does seem to emerge is the 'naturalness' of family life and the learning that occurs as children engage fully in that family life. What follows is that EHE researchers ought to focus more clearly not on the approaches to education per se, but on approaches to family life and the kinds of relationships between members of the family. (By extension, I think the same ought to direct work in other 'informal' education settings such as chapels and literary societies.)

As Kolodny (2010) points out, the characteristics of particular relationships between people emerge from the characteristics of the individual shared experiences of those people over time. So Godwin's relationship with his son with respect to school life is characterised by a particular history of family relationships and involvement in family life. This kind of analysis allows for a more considered reflection of the changing views of EHE practitioners over time. The experience of home educating shapes the relationship between parents, children and siblings, and itself comes to be part of the characterisation of family life. The approach to education, as to family life, is a fluid affair, in which parental dispositions, resources, context, broader community activity, and the experiences of children, and parents as home educators, combine in complex ways to direct EHE, and change it over the period the child is being home educated.

V. Conclusion

In drawing on the papers in this Special Issue I have explored the potential contribution they offer for EHE. The papers themselves cover the last era in the UK when education ideas and disputes were articulated without the perceived normalcy of the school. As such they represent a particular set of resources for EHE practitioners to think through their own practice without reference to the school. Following on from earlier work, I have drawn on 'upbringing' as a central justifying framework for the education of children. Education, whether conducted in the family or in school, ought to enable children to live better lives. The historical accounts, and the analysis of past educational practices, direct attention to both the purpose of, and approaches to, education. My focus has not been on exploring particular approaches to education, but the way in which such approaches can, and ought to be articulated.

In coming to a conclusion, I have argued that we ought to focus less on the characteristics of education and more on the characteristics of the family. This draws attention away from a schooling discourse on 'learning outcomes', towards a focus on the child learning through active engagement in the life of the family. The normative focus is on the kind of family which provides the context for a 'suitable education'. This is a politically sensitive arena as it *prioritises* questions about the nature and structure of families over the skills and abilities of parents as educators. It also raises differing accounts of 'pedagogy', rejecting a focus on method, for a concern with the character of the educator.

Alongside this argument for EHE practitioners (and researchers), I have offered some distinctions reflected in contemporary EHE practice which may be of interest to historians considering 'domestic pedagogies', in particular, distinctions between different accounts of pedagogy, practices and institutions, and different dimensions on the formal–informal continuum. These distinctions offered me an insight into the historical narratives presented. The value of these narratives for EHE is that they offer different perspectives on both 'domestic' and 'pedagogy', however, there are dangers in overstating *both* the similarity and dissimilarity. These distinctions, I hope, tread a line between both.

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