

Author: Anna Chinazzi

# Home education as a provocation for the future of education

*Updated Wednesday, 3 January 2024*

UNESCO's 2021 report 'Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education' sets out an invitation to all education stakeholders to participate in policy discussion, research and innovation to transform education.

Find out more about The Open University's **Education courses and qualifications**.



We all are called to engage in a dialogue based on two fundamental principles: the right to quality education throughout life, and education as a public endeavour and a common good.

Home education is a form of educational provision alternative to conventional schooling that might be seen as diametrically opposed to the UNESCO's (2021) vision of a shared and public education for all. Simultaneously, the report seems to convey the idea of co-construction of the future of education. Everyone, state and non-state actors, is entitled to a voice.

In my paper (Chinazzi, 2023), I have explored the extent to which home education is a challenge or a provocation to UNESCO's vision.

A polarised public controversy surrounds home education. For some critics, it potentially holds children back from becoming responsible and agentic members of society (see Apple, 2000; Bartholet, 2019; Lubienski, 2000, 2003). On the other hand, the empirical scholarship broadly supports the idea that home-educated students acquire social, emotional and inter-personal skills and academic outcomes equivalent to or

even 'better' than their schooled peers (see Medlin, 2013; Pearlman-Avni and Grayevsky, 2019; Ray, 2013; Tweni et al., 2022; and Unger Madar and BenDavid-Hadar, 2022).

However, it is noteworthy that evaluating the variety of social and academic 'outcomes' of home education is challenging. Standardised measures of attainment are not reliable assessment tools because of the bespoke and informal nature of curricula, methods of 'teaching' and learning associated with home education. In addition, due to the lack of representative data, it is problematic to generalise small-scale qualitative research findings.

Furthermore, home-educating families within and across national and international contexts, are not a homogenous group in terms of demographics, motivations and practices. Rather, home education encompasses a broad spectrum of educational philosophies, methods, curricula, styles and approaches (Fensham-Smith, 2020). For these reasons, **it is not possible to determine whether home-schooling is either intrinsically 'better' or 'worse' than conventional schooling**, as similarly argued by other scholars (Dwyer and Peters, 2019; Fensham-Smith, 2021; Neuman and Guterman, 2016; and Pattison, 2015).



Research on home education should serve a different purpose: to shed light on the growing discrepancies between the school system and families' expectations. In recent years, the shifting landscape of home education (Jolly and Matthews, 2020), has witnessed a notable increase in the number of 'accidental home educators' (English, 2021), warranting additional attention. Many families are opting for home education not for a deliberate choice, but as the 'last resort option', especially in the case of children with special educational needs (Gillie, 2022; Kendall and Taylor, 2016; Maxwell et al., 2020). The pandemic schooling experience, related to the COVID-19 pandemic, also served as a crucial catalyst for the rise of home education. In addition, some marginal home-educating groups, for example Black, Gypsy, Traveller, and Roma families, are still not adequately represented in research (Myers, 2020).

On these bases, Chinazzi (2023) concluded that:








- We need to go beyond stigmatised, polarised and simplistic perspectives to foster the authentic engagement of the EHE communities in research and policymaking processes. Considering the principles of the social contract for education outlined in UNESCO (2021), home-educated students and home educators should be entitled to a voice in the co-construction of the future of education.
- Due to the private nature of the practice and the complexity of assessing its outcomes, home education is not the ideal arrangement to serve and monitor the social function of education. Nevertheless, it should not be considered as an obstacle for the realisation of a better future of education. On the contrary, home education can be seen as a fruitful provocation of 'the education for all education vision' wherein, the prevalence and existence of home education is a 'Socratic gadflies' that invites its stakeholders to critically examine the multi-faceted and contested purposes of education. This may serve as a constructive criticism for the development of the school system itself, which – as also stated in the UNESCO's report (2021) – does not always meet the needs and rights of all children and young people.

## Key messages

Considering the practice of home education, to fulfil and enact UNESCO's aim of enabling new possibilities for transforming education for all, the following key messages stand out:

- **For researchers:** Further empirical studies on home education are required to capture the evolving landscape of educational practices that extend beyond formal education. Involving families in participatory research initiatives can help gather perspectives from home-educating students, who are often overlooked despite being central stakeholders. This is crucial for enhancing understanding of educational, social and emotional outcomes, including the transitions of home-educating young people to higher and further education (Wheeler, 2023). Additionally, researchers should adopt accessible dissemination practices to create bridging spaces with practitioners and policymakers.
- **For home-education practitioners:** Home-education practitioners, including both educators and students, are encouraged to assert their voices and share their perspectives, actively contributing to the larger conversation on the future of education for all. Research dissemination initiatives should be taken into consideration so they could feed forward into pedagogic and daily educational practices.
- **For policymakers:** Policymakers are urged to participate in knowledge-exchange and research dissemination initiatives. This would foster meaningful and empirically informed contributions to the policy-cycle through multi-agency partnerships.

## References

1. UNESCO (2021) *Reimagining our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education*. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000379707> 
2. Chinazzi, A. (2023) 'A social contract for home education: a framework for the homeschooling debate', *Encyclopaedia*, 27(65), pp. 35–48. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.1825-8670/15312> 
3. Apple, M. (2000) 'Away with all teachers: the cultural politics of home schooling', *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 10(1), pp. 61–80. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09620210000200049> 
- Bartholet, E. (2019) 'Homeschooling: Parent rights absolutism vs. child rights to education & protection', *Arizona Law Review*, 62, pp. 1–80. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3391331> 
- Lubienski, C. (2000) 'Whither the common good? A critique of home schooling', *Peabody Journal of Education*, 75(1–2), pp. 207–32. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327930pje751&2\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327930pje751&2_12) 
- Lubienski, C. (2003) 'A critical view of home education', *Evaluation & Research in Education*, 17(2–3), pp. 167–78. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2000.968194> 
4. Medlin, R.G. (2013) 'Homeschooling and the question of socialization revisited', *Peabody Journal of Education*, 88(3), pp. 284–97. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2013.796825> 
- Pearlman-Avni, S. and Grayevsky, M. (2019) 'Homeschooling, civics, and socialization: the case of Israel', *Education and Urban Society*, 51(7), pp. 970–88. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124517747973> 
- Ray, B.D. (2013) 'Homeschooling associated with beneficial learner and societal outcomes but educators do not promote it', *Peabody Journal of Education*, 88(3), pp. 324–41. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2013.798508> 
- Tweni, F. M., Wamocha, L. and Buhere, P. (2022) 'The socialization conundrum: comparing social learning outcomes of homeschooled and traditionally schooled children in Kenya', *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy*, 6(4), pp. 247–53. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.36348/jaep.2022.v06i04.007> 
- Unger Madar, M. and BenDavid-Hadar, I. (2022) 'Does home schooling improve creative thinking and social competencies among children? Home schooling in Israel', *Journal of School Choice*, 16(1), pp. 136–63. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15582159.2021.1977584> 
5. Fensham-Smith, A. (2020) 'Should we really call this home schooling? Reflections from the research field', *BERA Blog – British Educational Research Association*, 6 May 2020. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/should-we-really-call-this-home-schooling-reflections-from-the-research-field> 
6. Dwyer, J.G. and Peters, S.F. (2019) *Homeschooling: The History and Philosophy of a Controversial Practice*. University of Chicago Press. Available at: <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/H/bo38181464.html> 
- Fensham-Smith, A. (2021) 'Invisible pedagogies in home education: freedom, power and control', *Journal of Pedagogy*, 12(1), pp. 5–27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2478/jped-2021-0001> 
- Neuman, A. and Guterman, O. (2016) 'Academic achievements and homeschooling – it all depends on the goals', *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 51, pp. 1–6. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2016.08.005> 
- Pattison, H. (2015) 'How to desire differently: home education as a heterotopia', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 49(4), pp. 619–37. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12130> 
7. Jolly, J.L. and Matthews, M.S. (2020) 'The shifting landscape of the homeschooling continuum', *Educational Review*, 72(3), pp. 269–80. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1552661> 
8. English, R. (2021) 'The accidental home educator: a new conceptualisation of home education choice', in R. English (ed.) *Global Perspectives on Home Education in the 21st Century* (pp. 30–48). IGI Global. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-6681-7.ch003> 
9. Gillie, S. (2022) 'Family transitions and home education: Circumstances, processes and practices', EdD thesis, The Open University, UK. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.21954/ou.ro.0001421e> 
- Kendall, L. and Taylor, E. (2016) "'We can't make him fit into the system": parental reflections on the reasons why home education is the only option for their child who has special educational needs', *Education* 3–13, 44(3), pp. 297–310. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2014.974647> 
- Maxwell, N., Doughty, J., Slater, T., Forrester, D. and Rhodes, K. (2020) 'Home education for children with additional learning needs—a better choice or the only option?' *Educational Review*, 72(4), pp. 427–42. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1532955> 
10. Myers, M. (2020) 'Gypsies and other homeschoolers: the challenges of researching an alternative education', in M. Ward. and S. Delamont (eds) *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Education* (pp. 211–22). Edward Elgar Publishing. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788977159.00028> 
11. Wheeler, L. (2023) 'Widening access for home-educated applicants to Higher Education Institutions in England', *International Journal of Educational and Life Transitions*, 2(1), pp. 1–12. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5334/ijelt.54> 

## Learn more about home-educating children...



### Employability Hub

Welcome, in this hub you'll find a range of FREE resources that may help you develop your employability. It is searchable by...

[Learn more >](#)

 **Collection**




### Children's perspectives on play

In this free course, Children's perspectives on play, you are asked to put yourself in the place of young children and to...

[Learn more >](#)

 **Free course**

 5 hours

**Level: 1** Introductory




### Introduction to child psychology

Childhood is a time of rapid growth and development, and studying these changes is endlessly stimulating. In this free...

[Learn more >](#)

 **Free course**

 8 hours

**Level: 1** Introductory




### Supporting children's development

Supporting children's development is an introductory course for anyone who is interested in children's development...

[Learn more >](#)

 **Free course**

 15 hours

**Level: 1** Introductory

## Articles in this collection...



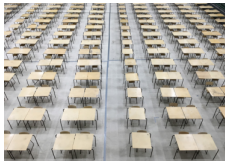
### Home education collection

This collection of articles is intended to support the educational and professional practices of groups of practitioners, learners...

[Read now >](#)

 **Article**

**Level: 1** Introductory



### How home educators access exams

There are an estimated 80.000 children home-educated in England. No accurate data is available on how many of these...

[Read now >](#)

 **Article**

**Level: 1** Introductory



### A guide to developing trust with...

As the population of home-educating families continues to grow, how can professionals improve how they work with...

[Read now >](#)

 **Article**

**Level: 1** Introductory



### Transitioning from home education to...

Understanding the experiences of previously home-educated adults.

[Read now >](#)

 **Article**

**Level: 1** Introductory



### Home education: levelling the playing field or...

My recent research on Elective Home Educators (EHE) experience of exam cancellations revealed not only...

[Read now >](#)

 **Article**

**Level: 1** Introductory



### Home education for children with special...

As a specialist teacher and volunteer with a local autism charity, I had contact with families who had deregistered from...

[Read now >](#)

 **Article**

**Level: 1** Introductory



### We learn, together: exploring familial...

There has been continuing annual growth in the number of children and young people being home-educated across the...

[Read now >](#)

 **Article**

**Level: 1** Introductory

