Learning with Mothers

A Study of Home Schooling in China

Xiaoming Sheng

The literature in relation to home schooling grounded in empirical research and focusing on gender role and the impacts of social class has been neglected and unexplored. Home schooling is at an initial period, for the public, researchers, media and educational authorities in China it is mysterious and even abnormal or odd. This book seeks to bring a rich body of qualitative data to provide in-depth information in relation to the demographic characteristics of home schooling parents, the motivations for home schooling in China, the process of practicing it and its relevant academic and social outcomes.

*Learning with Mothers* examines the social difference in terms of social class in the process of home schooling and also takes account of gender difference in terms of parental involvement, aiming to answer the questions about home schooling, such as:

- Who are practicing home schooling for their children?
- Why do parents choose to home school their children?
- How are parents involved in their home schooling?
- What is accomplished in doing so?

This book is the first book in relation to home schooling in China. This book will be essential reading for researchers, postgraduate students and Chinese parents with in-depth information in relation to summary of updated literature on home schooling in China.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was written during a period in which my father was very ill and my mother was recovering from a serious traffic accident. This book is for my parents. I would like to show my gratitude to them for their love and support during the whole period of this research study. I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to Sister Siu for her belief in me and full support all the time. I am also very thankful for the support from Sheila. Without their support, I could not have started my research and finished this book.

There are too many people who have helped me to acknowledge fully here. I wish to thank to all the interviewees and respondents involved in the process of the qualitative data collection for their kind and full support during the period of my fieldwork.

Xiaoming Sheng
September 2013
PREFACE

When I was engaged in a research project focusing on parents’ involvement in Beijing, I started to get to know a group of homeschooling families in Beijing. From this I began to take a special interest in the research topic of home schooling in China. Since then I have devoted myself to exploring the motivation of homeschooling families, the process of home schooling and its outcomes through document review, observations, and various forms of interview over the past few years.

Home schooling is at an early stage: for the public, researchers, media and educational authorities in China it is mysterious and even abnormal or odd. Yet the research relating to homeschooling families has been entirely ignored. In particular the literature grounded in empirical research and focusing on gender role and the impacts of social class is negligible in the educational context of China. The public, parents and researchers have many questions about home schooling, and many researchers and middle-class parents in China are taking a specific interest in this educational phenomenon.

This book uniquely provides comprehensive first-hand data and an in-depth analysis of home schooling in the Chinese context. This book aims to contribute to the literature and reveal the motivation, teaching process, and experiences of homeschooling families in China. Meanwhile, what is happening in the development of home schooling in China is anticipated to contribute to the literature of home schooling in world wide. The objectives of this book, then, are to adopt a sociocultural perspective and used relevant conceptual tools to examine existing social differences in terms of gender and social class in the process of home schooling in the context of China.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Chinese society has been experiencing a period of transition from a planned, centrally controlled economy to a market economy since 1978. The relevant literature indicates that the social transformation has been an impetus for, and is reflected in, educational changes (Fagerlind and Saha, 1989; Carnoy and Samoff, 1990). Parents, particularly middle-class parents, are willing to strive for the best education for their children, which has led to a noticeable change in parental choices regarding children’s education. Such choices have become varied and diversified. Middle-class parents are enthusiastic about the individual education and having a variety of educational services from which to choose. When the above forces combine, the requirements of middle-class families in terms of their children’s education have resulted in the emergence of various forms of alternative education. In the first years of the 21st century, home schooling, as an educational phenomenon, has emerged in the big cities of China, such as Beijing and Shanghai.

However, being a marginal educational phenomenon, the study of home schooling has been entirely ignored in the educational context of China, perhaps because homeschooling families have generally been dissatisfied with mainstream schooling, or because the majority of such families have strong religious beliefs. There is no literature that has systematically examined parental decisions to school their children at home or how parents are involved in home schooling in China. In particular the literature grounded in empirical research and focusing on gender role and the impacts of social class is negligible in China. This book therefore seeks to examine whether there are social class differences in the process of deciding to educate children at home and, if so, to explore what they are. In addition, I will draw specific attention to gender differences in the practice of home schooling. This book attempts to use a rich body of qualitative data to provide in-depth information about the demographic characteristics of homeschooling parents, the motivations for home schooling in the context of China, the process of practising it and its relevant academic and social outcomes.

In seeking answers to the above questions, this book uses theoretical tools in order to explore social differences in terms of social class and gender in the practice of home schooling. I suggest that the experiences of Western researchers may provide some useful analytical tools. Bourdieu’s concepts, such as capital, can be seen as a useful lens in the exploration of social inequality in terms of class and gender (McNay, 1999; Lawler, 2004; DiMaggio and Mukhtar, 2004; Reay et al., 2005; Bennett et al., 2009; Sheng, 2012a, 2012b, 2013b). As DiMaggio and Mukhtar (2004:99) assert, scholars from around the world have contributed to the literature that focuses on the relationship between family background, cultural capital and
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the influences of cultural capital on educational outcomes, not merely in Western Europe and the USA, but Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia.

Bourdieu’s concepts and the cultural reproduction model have proved to be useful in the exploration of social stratification and social class in a range of socialist and communist countries, as well as in the context of China. There is extensive literature that supports the claim that Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, particularly the concepts of capital and habitus, is valuable in terms of understanding the reproduction of inequality in socialist and communist countries (Mateju, 2002; Mink, 2002; Outhwait, 2007). Also a number of empirical studies which have emerged from the socialist societies of Eastern Europe have provided strong evidence to support cultural capital theory and the reproduction of culture (Ganzeboom et al., 1990; Mateju and Peschar, 1990). In the last few decades Bourdieu’s concepts, as well as his cultural reproduction model and cultural mobility model, have been central to a number of Chinese studies. Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital is used to explore inequality and social stratification in urban China (Liu, 2005; Li, 2005; Sheng, 2012a, 2013a). Sheng (2012a, 2012b, 2013b) argues that Bourdieu’s conceptual framework and his cultural reproduction model have applicability to the context of socialist China. Accordingly Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural, social and economic capital have been utilized to examine class and gender differences in the process of practising home schooling in the context of China.

THE FOCUS OF THE BOOK

As a marginal educational phenomenon, academic researchers have failed to examine the development of home education in the context of China. Policy-makers and education officials have had little substantive information about home schooling. This book reports the findings of a data-based research study of home schooling families in urban China in order to provide in-depth information about the demographic characteristics of home schooling parents, the motivations for home schooling in China, the process of practising it and its outcomes. This book mainly focuses upon several issues, including social stratification, gender and home schooling, which are now attracting scholarly interest and public attention. This book arises from an empirical study which was based on Bourdieu’s theory. The strongest aspect of this book in my opinion is the fact that research on cultural capital, social stratification, gender and home schooling is relatively sparse in the Chinese context. The book may facilitate further discussion and bring a timely well-argued analysis of home schooling, social stratification and gender to English-speaking readers as well as Chinese readers.

The secondary aim of this book is to take a sociocultural perspective and develop an analytical framework regarding home schooling in the Chinese context. Nearly all the literature focusing on home schooling is descriptive rather than theoretical. The topic of home schooling seems to be less theorised. This book is firmly based on Bourdieu’s theoretical framework to provide an insight into how social class and gender differences influence parental involvement in children’s home schooling. It
has adopted a sociocultural perspective and utilized Bourdieu’s concepts to conduct an empirical research study of homeschooling families in contemporary Chinese society. The book seeks to examine social differences in terms of social class and gender in the process of practising home schooling in China and also takes account of gender differences in relation to parental involvement.

The discussion on gender issues is a distinctive topic that is rarely found in China’s literature on social and education issues. In this book, the role of mothers is seen to be central to understandings of parental involvement in children’s home schooling. Furthermore, the majority of the literature that exists in the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia tends to focus solely on the voice of mothers, but not that of fathers. In this book, the involvement of fathers is also discussed. Moreover, I am especially interested in exploring the reasons that mothers are almost always the parents who practise home schooling, not fathers. An in-depth analysis of the process of home schooling is provided with the aim of making effective suggestions to policy-makers, educational officials and parents. Several research questions are posed in this book: Who is practising home schooling? Why do parents choose to home school their children? How are parents involved in their home schooling? What is accomplished in doing so? Further, what are the social class differences operating in the decision to practise home schooling? Why is the homeschooling parent almost always the mother? In brief, this research study aims to reveal the motivation, teaching process and experiences of homeschooling families through document review, observations, and various forms of interviews in order to provide an insight into home schooling, this alternative educational path for children in current China.

There are several limitations to my work which I would like to make clear here. Firstly, as I indicated previously, home schooling is illegal under current educational law. In this specific circumstance, the participants were primarily homeschooling parents who registered for a training programme provided by a church in Beijing. There might have been a number of parents who operated home education on an individual basis who were overlooked in this research study. Secondly, I paid particular attention to the parental involvement in children’s home schooling, while focusing less on the children as some parents refused to let their children be involved in this research. Thirdly, I also recognise that in line with Klein’s (2006) argument, the complexities of home educators in the context of China may not be captured by simplistic typologies. In this book I have attempted to develop a typology of the main characteristics of homeschooling families, as well as the intra-class differences within the middle classes in China. However, as only 24 middle-class mothers and eight middle-class fathers were interviewed, the typology needs to be seen as tentative and indicative and requiring further research to test out its wider applicability.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

A brief description of the research contexts of this research will be covered in the next chapter. In Chapter Two an introduction focusing on social classification in the
contemporary Chinese transitional society will be provided. Then the main analytical tools will be introduced, including cultural capital, social capital, economic capital, and habitus, followed by a description of the different volumes of cultural, social and economic capital possessed by parents from the different social groups. A summary will be provided of recent research focusing on home schooling in the Western context. Then a brief note on the research background to home schooling in China will be given. Finally, this chapter will briefly describe the research strategies and research methods adopted by this research.

Chapters Three to Four focus on the findings generated by the analysis of the qualitative data. Chapter Four provides in-depth information regarding the motivations for home schooling and the demographic characteristics of home schooling parents in China. It begins with a description of the reasons that homeschooling themselves parents decided to provide education for their children, followed by a brief summary of which people practicing home schooling for their children. Chapter Four discusses the process of practising home schooling and several primary aspects of this process are covered: the feelings of parents, the choice of textbooks, teaching content, teaching methods, and the influence of religious belief.

Chapter Five is concerned with Bourdieu’s concepts, including cultural, social and economic capital, and explores the ways in which the familial resources affect the process of practising home schooling in China. There is specific discussion of the ways in which the different volumes of cultural, social and economic capital that families possess influence the ability of parents to mobilize their children’s cultural capital through the practice of home schooling.

In Chapter Six, gender differences in relation to home schooling are explored. It begins with a description of gender differences as they relate to parental involvement in the process of home education. This chapter then presents an in-depth analysis of the reasons that mothers are almost always the parent who practises home schooling, not fathers. Finally, based on the qualitative data of this research, I specially address the way in which fathers are involved in their children’s home schooling.

Chapter Seven pays particular attention to the description of the case studies of home schooling in Shanghai. It begins with a brief description of the development of ‘Meng Mu Tang’ in Shanghai since 2006. I then provide a short discussion of the outcomes of the form of home education referred to as ‘Meng Mu Tang’. Chapter Eight begins with a brief summary of findings with a focus on social differences in terms of social class and gender in the home education process. In particular this research provides an insight into the intra-class differences within the middle classes in relation to decision-making and practising home education in China. Finally, the implications for educational policies and practices are explored.
CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH CONTEXTS

In this chapter the reasons that this research adopted a sociological perspective on education will be explained. The chapter begins with a theoretical review of why Bourdieu’s theory was chosen from among a number of sociological theories which focus on social inequality in academic settings. Secondly, a description of Bourdieu’s main concepts, such as capital, habitus and distinction are given, followed by an introduction to the application of Bourdieu’s concepts in China. Then I provide a brief review of past literature on home schooling, which includes the motivations, the outcomes, and the influential factors regarding home schooling, and who chooses to home school their children? An overall review of the relevant studies which focus on the issues of social class, gender and home schooling will be given. Thirdly, I will present the contexts of home schooling. Fourthly, I will provided a brief introduction relating to the legal situation of home schooling in the Western countries, followed by a introduction of legal situation regarding home schooling in China. Finally, I will describe the research methodology of this research, including the research strategy, research design, pilot study, secondary research, semi-structured interview, sampling, and interview practice.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Studies have provided an abundance of evidence to support the notion of social inequality relating to class and gender in academic settings. The relationships between social classes, gender and education in the Western countries has been researched frequently over a period of time. In this context there exist a considerable number of different viewpoints about theory among sociologists. One important point of difference is between those whose main aim is to explore the structural fit between the education system and the economic order (Bowles and Gintis, 1976) and those who attempt to explore how certain cultural norms and cultural practices which support the middle classes are transmitted and reproduced within the educational system (Bourdieu, 1973, 1977, 1984, 1986, 1990; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

As noted by Mottier (2002:345), Pierre Bourdieu’s reputation as one of the most important social theorists of our time is uncontested in the Anglo-Saxon context. As a reproduction theorist Bourdieu developed a system of conceptions, such as capital, habitus, field and distinction, which provide an ideal theoretical means to research the sociology of education (DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Calhoun et al., 1993; Mohr and DiMaggio, 1995; Lareau, 1987, 1989, 2000; Robbins, 1991,
1993; Grenfell et al. 1998; Sullivan, 2001; Brantlinger, 1993, 2003; Bennett et al., 2009). As Nash (1999:124) has pointed out, Bourdieu’s central concept of ‘habitus’ offers a powerful tool for observing and understanding the experiences of social agents in order to gain knowledge of the ways in which social structures have their impact on practice.

Bourdieu’s concepts, in particular, that of capital and habitus, have had a significant influence on British and American research on the family, cultural capital and educational attainment (DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Lamont, 1992; Lareau, 1987; Lamont and Lareau, 1988; Katsillis and Rubinson, 1990; Bryson, 1996; Holt, 1997, 1998; Aschaffenburg and Maas, 1997; Roscigno and Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; De Graaf et al., 2000; Lizardo, 2004); family background and children’s educational attainment (Dimaggio, 1982; DiMaggio and Mohr, 1985; Mohr and DiMaggio, 1995; Katsillis and Rubinson, 1990; Niehof and Ganzeboom, 1996; Kalmijn and Kraaykamp, 1996; Sullivan, 2001); and the influences of parental cultural capital on parents’ knowledge of children’s college admission procedures (Weis, 1988; McDonough, 1997; Thomas, 2002). Several scholars have also integrated Bourdieu’s concept of habitus to explore the influences of habitus on students’ educational attainment (McDonough, 1997; Thomas, 2002).

A large number of studies have revealed that cultural capital continues to be significant in socialist societies (Kolosi, 1988; Kolosi and Vnuk-Lipinski, 1983; Mateju and Peschar, 1990; Robert, 1990; Ganzeboom et al., 1990). There is both evidence and arguments to support the use of Bourdieu’s concepts in relation to socialist and communist countries. As Outhwaite (2007) argues, Bourdieu’s model of class, framed as it is in terms of cultural capital and habitus, makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of the restoration of capitalism in the post-communist period.

In the past few decades, Bourdieu’s concepts have been central to a number of Chinese studies. For example, at the theoretical level, growing attention has been focused on Bourdieu’s conceptual framework and the theory of the reproduction of culture (Xiao, 1996; Wang, 2000; Hong, 2000; Li, 2001; Li, 2003; Guo, 2005; Chen, 2006; Niu and Bai, 2006). Employing educational and sociological perspectives, several researchers have attempted to provide a better understanding of the implications of Bourdieu’s concept of capitals in the context of China (Zhu, 2005; Guo, 2005; Zhu, 2007). Zhu (2007) has conducted a theoretical analysis of the impact of Bourdieu’s cultural capital on the economic sphere in China. He argues that variations in individual educational level are associated with differential access to various occupational positions (Zhu, 2007).

In the past few decades, Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital has been used to examine social stratification and inequality (Li, 2005; Sheng, 2012b, 2013b). Social capital has been employed to explore social relationships in urban China (Yang, 1994) and examine the influences of family background on children’s educational attainment (Sheng, 2012a, 2012b). Bourdieu’s concept of habitus has been adopted to explore gender differences in terms of parental involvement in children’s educational
choices (Sheng, 2012a, 2012b, 2013b). These studies have highlighted a number of strengths and weaknesses in the application of Bourdieu’s conceptual tools in contemporary Chinese transitional society. In this research, Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural, social and economic capital and habitus have been employed to examine the social class and gender differences in terms of parental involvement in children’s schooling. The analysis of social class differences has attempted to fill some of the theoretical gaps existing in the Chinese educational research by focusing on internal class differences within social classes.

**Capital**

Capital is a key concept of Bourdieu’s theory. The concepts of capital have played a vital role in educational research since the work of Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) on reproduction in education first emerged. In particular Bourdieu’s conception of capital is widely used in the sociology of education and has made a major contribution towards explaining and understanding social inequality and difference, and gender and class reproduction. So what is the meaning of capital? For Bourdieu, capital can be seen as not only something that is owned, such as real estate, but also something that is embodied, which exists in both material and symbolic forms (Bourdieu, 1986). In Bourdieu’s sense the amount of capital that can be accumulated by an individual makes a significant contribution to determining an individual’s social status (Bourdieu, 1986).

The conceptions of capital offered by Bourdieu mainly include social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), the concept of cultural capital exists in different forms, to which there are two aspects: firstly, incorporation ‘in the form of education and knowledge’ and secondly, the symbolic, which emphasises aesthetic values, standards and styles. Cultural capital can be seen as access to characteristics, knowledge, skills and forms of expression that are culturally valued (Bourdieu, 1986:243). In the view of Bourdieu (1986:241), the educational system makes a contribution to the reproduction of the social structure by sanctioning the hereditary transmission of cultural capital.

**Cultural capital**

Cultural capital consists of three forms in Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, namely, which are institutional, objectified and embodied cultural capital. Institutional forms are regarded as formal certificates, such as academic degrees and diplomas. Objectified forms are found in the form of cultural resources, such as books, instruments or art works. Embodied cultural capital is seen in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). Cultural capital is understood as access to characteristics, knowledge, skills and forms of expression that are culturally valued (Bourdieu, 1986:243). Bourdieu suggests that:
Cultural capital can exist in three forms: in the embodied state, i.e. in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the institutionalized state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee. (Bourdieu, 1986:243)

Institutional forms are regarded as formal certificates, such as educational qualifications. As Bourdieu (1996, 170) asserts, in the ‘judgments’ and ‘classifiable practices’, certain educational qualifications may be considered to be ‘distinctive signs’, which can be used to distinguish a class from other social groups. Objectified forms are found in the form of cultural resources, such as books, artefacts, dictionaries, instruments and art works (ibid.). Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as capital – in whatever form – insofar as it is represented, that is, apprehended symbolically, in a relationship of knowledge or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition, [which] presupposes the intervention of the habitus, as a socially constituted cognitive capacity (Bourdieu, 1986: 255). According to Bourdieu (1986:244-245), embodied cultural capital is referred to as ‘external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus’. As Bourdieu (1986:244) states:

…it implies a labour of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor…the work of acquisition is work on oneself (self-improvement), an effort that presupposes a personal cost…an investment, above all of time, but also of that socially constituted form of libido,…with all the privation, renunciation, and sacrifice that it may entail (Bourdieu, 1986: 244).

As for the concept of the embodied cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986) states:

This embodied capital, external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus, cannot be transmitted instantaneously (unlike money, property rights, or even titles of nobility) by gift or bequest, purchase or exchange. It follows that the use or exploitation of cultural capital presents particular problems for the holders of economic or political capital, whether they be private patrons or, at the other extreme, entrepreneurs employing executives endowed with a specific cultural competence (not to mention the new state patrons) (Bourdieu, 1986-244-245).

Bourdieu (1986: 245) describes the objectified state of cultural capital as follows:

…it in the objectified state, cultural capital has a number of properties which are defined only in the relationship with cultural capital in its embodied form. The cultural capital objectified in material objects and media, such as writings, paintings, monuments, instruments, etc., is transmissible in its materiality. A
collection of paintings, for example, can be transmitted as well as economic capital (if not better, because the capital transfer is more disguised) (Bourdieu, 1986: 245).

**Social capital**

For Bourdieu (1986), social capital is described as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships (Bourdieu, 1986:244). These relationships are more or less enacted, and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges. On the basis of indissoluble material and symbolic exchanges, the establishment and maintenance of which presuppose reacknowledgement of proximity, they are also partially irreducible to objective relations of proximity in physical (geographical) space or even in economic and social space. The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilise and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected (Bourdieu, 1986:252). As Bourdieu (1986: 248) states:

Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity - owned capital, a ‘credential’ which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word. These relationships may exist only in the practical state, in material and/or symbolic exchanges which help to maintain them. They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name (the name of a family, a class, or a tribe or of a school, a party, etc.) and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them; in this case, they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges. (Bourdieu, 1986:248)

Social capital works within social groups and networks in the form of exchanges, social obligations, and symbols to define group membership, fix boundaries and create a sense of belonging (Bourdieu, 1993). Bourdieu (1986:248) asserts that ‘the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilise and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected.’ The existence of a network of connections is not a natural given, or even a social given, constituted once and for all by an initial act of an institution, represented, in the case of the family group, by the genealogical definition of kinship relations, which is the characteristic of a social formation (Bourdieu, 1986:248).
In Bourdieu’s sense, the network of relationships is ‘the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term, i.e., at transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighbourhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective, implying durable obligations subjectively felt (feelings of gratitude, respect, friendship, etc.) or institutionally guaranteed (rights)’ (Bourdieu, 1986: 249). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986:249) provides an explanation regarding how social capital is reproduced:

This is done through the alchemy of consecration, the symbolic constitution produced by social institution (institution as a relative – brother, sister, cousin, etc. – or as a knight, an heir, an elder, etc.) and endlessly reproduced in and through the exchange (of gifts, words, women, etc.) which it encourages and which presupposes and produces mutual knowledge and recognition. Exchange transforms the things exchanged into signs of recognition and, through the mutual recognition and the recognition of group membership which it implies, reproduces the group. (Bourdieu, 1986:249)

**Economic capital**

Economic capital is wealth that is owned and which is inherited or created from exchanges between the individual and the economy. Bourdieu (1986:243) refers to economic capital ‘which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights’. For Bourdieu (1986), economic capital comprises monetary income, as well as other financial resources and assets, and finds its institutional expression in property rights.

According to Bourdieu (1984:137), the conversion of different forms of capital is usually used as a class strategy to maintain and improve an individual social position. Bourdieu (1986:249) states that:

The convertibility of the different types of capital is the basis of the strategies aimed at ensuring the reproduction of capital (and the position occupied in social space) by means of the conversions least costly in terms of conversion work and of the losses inherent in the conversion itself (in a given state of the social power relations). The different types of capital can be distinguished according to their reproducibility or, more precisely, according to how easily they are transmitted, i.e., with more or less loss and with more or less concealment; the rate of loss and the degree of concealment tend to vary in inverse ratio. Everything which helps to disguise the economic aspect also tends to increase the risk of loss (particularly the intergenerational transfers). (Bourdieu, 1986:249)

In the view of Bourdieu (1986), economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and one form of capital can be transformed into another.
Depending on the field in which it functions, and at the cost of the more or less expensive transformations which are the precondition for its efficacy in the field in question, capital can present itself in three fundamental guises: as economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights; as cultural capital, which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of educational qualifications; and as social capital, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the form of a title of nobility. (Bourdieu, 1986:243)

In this context economic capital can be converted into cultural capital, while cultural capital can be translated into social capital. For example, the cultural capital contained in an academic degree has the potential to be converted into economic capital through the particular type of job to which it provides access. The social capital obtained through the social connections built up in a rugby team or golf club may be transformed into economic capital through the access they provide to business exchanges (Shilling, 1993). In this research, economic capital refers to monetary income or wealth that is owned and which is inherited or created from exchanges between the individual and the economy (Bourdieu, 1986). In the interviews, economic capital was investigated using several indicators, including occupation, possessions, holidays and residential context.

Habitus

Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is central to his analysis of social identity and represents his attempt to theorise the ways in which the social is literally incorporated (Lawler, 2004). Bourdieu developed a system of concepts, such as capital, habitus, field and distinction, which provide ‘an ideal theoretical means’ to research the sociology of education. Habitus can be seen as Bourdieu’s way of analysing how social relations become constituted within the self, and also how the self is constitutive of social relations (Lawler, 2004). Horvat and Anthony (1999:319) argue that the concept of habitus has proved to be a useful analytical tool in ‘understanding how daily interactions influence individual dispositions and preferences, which in turn affect how individuals interact with their social world’. Moreover, there are many studies that have used the concept of habitus (Harker and May, 1993; Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997), the authors of which have often experimented with Bourdieu’s concepts, working on their understanding of them and developing new insights into educational practices (Gunter, 2002). Habitus is described by Bourdieu (1998) as follows:

Habitus is a socialized body. A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world—a field—and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world. (Bourdieu, 1998:81)
As one of the key concepts of Bourdieu’s theory, it is extremely difficult to pinpoint exactly what habitus means because views regarding the concept are quite diverse. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is central to his analysis of social identity, and represents his attempt to theorise the ways in which the social is literally incorporated (Lawler, 2002). It is Bourdieu’s way of theorising a self which is socially produced. It is a way of analysing how social relations become constituted within the self, but also how the self is constitutive of social relations (Lower, 2004). For Bourdieu (1977), habitus refers to:

Systems of durable transposable dispositions, structured structure predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them, and being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (Bourdieu, 1977:72)

In the view of Bourdieu (1990:13), habitus refers to ‘a system of acquired dispositions functioning at the practical level as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles as well as the organizing principles of action’. From this perspective, the concept of habitus tends to ‘to reproduce the objective structures of which they are the product, [and] they are determined by the past conditions which have produced the principle of their production’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 72-73). I also share the further explanation provided by Bourdieu in his 1996 work in which he suggests:

The relationship that is actually established between the pertinent characteristics of economic and social condition and the distinctive features associated with the corresponding position in the universe of life-styles only becomes intelligible when the habitus is constructed as the generative formula which makes it possible to account both for the classifiable practices and products and for the judgments, themselves classified, which make these practices and works into a system of distinctive signs. (Bourdieu, 1996:170)

Bourdieu (1990:56) regards habitus as ‘embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history’. As Lawler (2004:111) notes, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus ‘carries the concept of history—both personal history and social, or collective, history.’ Habitus can thus be seen as a compilation or collection of individual trajectories (Bourdieu, 1990). In other words, the individual history of a person is composed of habitus, as well as ‘the whole collective history of family and class that the individual is a member of’ (ibid.). As Bourdieu (1993:86) states, ‘the habitus can be defined as something historical, which is linked to individual history’. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) write that:
The habitus acquired in a family is at the basis of the structuring of school experiences…the habitus transformed by the action of the school, itself diversified, is in turn at the basis of all subsequent experiences…and so on, from restructuring to restructuring (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:134).

There is a question that arises in relation to this: how can habitus play a role in the social reproduction that takes place between individual and society? The literature reveals that there are several theoretical answers to this. For example, habitus functions only in the context of specific local contexts (Lawler, 2002). Bourdieu (1985) finds an indication of his concept of habitus in the Aristotelian idea of hexis - the incorporated and quasi-postural disposition, which consequently is transmitted by scholasticism into habitus (see Swartz, 1997:108). Bodily hexis is ‘political mythology realized, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking’ (Bourdieu, 1990:70). Bourdieu (1994:194-5) explains this as follows:

The motor - what is sometimes called motivation - resides neither in the material or symbolic purposes of action, as naïve finalists imagine, or in the constraints of the field, as the mechanistic thinkers suppose. It resides in the relation between the habitus and the field, which means that the habitus contributes to determining what determines it. (Bourdieu, 1994:194-5)

In Bourdieu’s (1977) sense, habitus was inculcated through both families and schools. The primary habitus is inculcated in an individual through the family, then through the influences of a system which is outside of the family – the school, which is seen as a part of the state apparatus. From this perspective, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus has been developed in relation to two aspects, namely, familial habitus and institutional habitus (Thomas, 2002). From this perspective, in their study, it has been recognised that although habitus can be deemed ‘a product of early childhood experience’ within the setting of the family, subsequent experiences of schooling also have effects on the formation of habitus.

**Distinction**

The conceptions of habitus and capital make it clear that a central aim in Bourdieu’s theory is to attempt to remove the dichotomy between the individual and society. In this context ‘habitus is learned more by experience than by teaching and through a socialisation process remains durable’ (Gunter, 2002:10). Bourdieu also states that during the socialisation process the objective social conditions in which the agent lives are inculcated and so habitus represents ‘structured structures.’ Furthermore, an agent can operate in a range of fields of activity but practice is still linked to the core habitus, and so habitus is transposable (Bourdieu, 1990:53). In order to avoid the shortcomings of objective determinism, Bourdieu developed the concepts of field and strategies to provide further explanation of the generative aspect of habitus (Bourdieu, 1993).
In Bourdieu’s (1990) sense a field can be seen as a partially independent social arena within struggles or manoeuvres that take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them. Fields are defined by the stakes which are at stake (Jenkins, 1992:84). The ‘relative power’ that determines positions of authority and subordination and locates individuals and social groups within fields is determined by the distribution and accumulation of different types of capital (Light, 2000:84). Bourdieu also proposes that ‘social magic’ brings people together, when there are people with similar dispositions which have developed under similar social conditions who have specific stakes and interests, such as lifestyle, education, politics and prestige (Bourdieu, 1990: 88). As he states,

The vocabulary of strategy – which is indispensable to retaining the active, constructive side of the most ordinary choices of the symbolic struggles of daily life, must not deceive us. The most efficacious strategies of distinction are those which find their principle in the practical, pre-reflexive, quasi-instinctual choices of habitus. (Bourdieu, 1987: 115)

PAST LITERATURE ON HOME SCHOOLING

Home schooling is in fact home-based education (Ray, 2000:276). As Ray (2000:71) asserts, home schooling is a sort of practice in which the education of children is clearly parent-controlled or parent-directed (and sometimes student-directed) during the conventional school hours of the normal school day. Similarly, Mayberry and Knowles (1989:12-3) regard home education as a way for parents to regain control of their children’s and their own lives, a way to make the impact they want on the next generation (Caldwell, 1999). Lines (1993:1) refers to home schooling as ‘the education of school-aged children at home rather than at a school’. Knowles et al. (1994) define the home school as the site where home education occurs, whereas home education is the process of parents teaching their children at home. Griffith (1998: ix) claims:

Holt originally used the word unschooling to describe the act of removing one’s children from school, but it soon became a synonym for “home schooling” Over the past two decades, the meaning of the term has evolved and narrowed, so that unschooling now refers to the specific style of homeschooling that Holt advocated, based on child centred learning. (Griffith, 1998: ix)

Parents are independently engaged in home schooling and take responsibility for the curriculum and evaluation of their children’s progress (Lines, 2000:160). Home schooling can be seen as a practice in which the education of children is clearly parent-controlled or parent-directed during conventional school hours (Ray, 2000:71). Ray (2002:35) provides a further definition of the philosophy of home schooling as follows:

A high degree of parental involvement in their children’s lives, community-oriented education, success in academics and an emphasis on the transmission
Moore (1999:1) defines home schooling as teaching in the home by one or more parents of the children (see Wynn, 1985:7; Van Oostrum and Van Oostrum, 1997:1). In the context of Australia, Barratt-Peacock (1997:14) claims that ‘home education occurs when the parents choose to educate their children from a home base… The total responsibility for home education rests with the child’s parents.’ NCES (2001:2) describes the concept of home schooling as follows: ‘Students whose parents reported them being schooled at home instead of in a public or private school and if their enrolment in a public or private school did not exceed 25 hours a week, and if they were not being homeschooled solely because of a temporary illness.’

According to Russell (1994:2), home schooling refers to 75 per cent or more of what the family considers to be schooling being provided by, or conducted under the supervision of, the parents. In the home education process, parents are ‘most often the primary decision makers about the daily activities, whether academic or social, of the children, and the majority of younger children’s time is spent with their families’ (Ray 2000:276). In the view of Smith and Sikkink (1999), home schooling refers to all types of non-public education, and home schooling, by closely uniting home, family, education and (usually) religious faith, may be the practice which is the most privatised and the most isolated from the concerns of the public sphere. Safran (2008:36) provides a definition of home schooling in the UK context, stating that home education is ‘the full time education of a child in and around the home where the parents or guardian are committed to their children’s education’. Statistics Canada defines home schools as a child participating in his or her education at home rather than attending a public, private, or other type of school (Basham et al., 2007:6).


In the past few decades, there has been rapid and dramatic growth of home schooling. As Collom (2005) asserts, in the USA home schooling has become an increasingly popular alternative educational path to that of conventional school education. Similarly Klein (2006) indicates that home schooling has become one of many educational choices available to parents today in the USA. At the beginning of the 1980s, up to 100 per cent of children and young people between the ages of 6 and 18 were in formal and institutional schools (Ray, 2000:73). On September 16th 1999, the USA Senate passed a resolution designating the week of September 19-25, 1999, as ‘National Home Education Week’ (Basham et al., 2007). Isenberg (2007:390)
claims that the best sources of information available for parents’ motivations to home educate were found in the data of the National Household Education Surveys (NHES). As Isenberg (2007:390) states, the data from the NHES surveys are ‘large enough to include a sufficiently large sample of homeschooled children and a comparison group of children who attend a conventional school’ in the USA. Data from the 1999 NHES stated that home schooling in the USA in 1999 was estimated to involve approximately 850,000 students who were being educated at home (Bielick et al., 2001), which was about 1.7 per cent of students nationwide aged from 5 to 17 in grades K-12 (Lawrence, 2007). For the 2001-2002 school year, the National Home Education Network estimated that there were around 1.1 million American students in grades K1 to 12 who were being educated at home (Lines, 1999; Dennis, 2000; Houston and Toma 2003; Princiotta et al., 2004), which represents a 29 per cent increase on the estimated number of home-schooled students in 1999 (Lawrence, 2007:2). Over the 2005-2006 school year it was estimated that between 1.9 and 2.4 million students were being educated at home in the United States (Ray, 2006). However, the data from the 2007 NHES survey offered a different estimate: they indicated that around 1.5 million students (1,508,000) were being home-educated, which was about 2.9 per cent of the school-aged population in the USA (Princiotta et al., 2004; Bielick, 2008). Compared to the data from the 2003 NHES survey, it shows a significant increase from the estimated 1.1 million home-schooled children in 2003 (Princiotta et al., 2004; Bielick, 2008). It is estimated that the number of home-educated students grows by 10 to 15 percent each year in the USA (Lines, 2000; McDowell and Ray, 2000; Cai, et al., 2002).

In the USA, the rapid growth of the home schooling movement has inspired academic researchers to exhibit a specific interest in studies of the phenomenon (Knowles, 1991; Ray, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2010; Apple, 2000, 2005, 2006; McDowell et al., 2000; Gross, 2003; Sampson, 2005; Bunday, 2006; Ellin, 2006; Princiotta et al., 2006). In the UK context, since the modern home schooling emerged in the late 1970s, a growing number of British researchers have paid attention on the rapid development of home schooling in the UK (Meighan and Brown, 1980; Meighan, 1981; Rothermel, 1999, 2002, 2004, 2010, 2011; Hopwood et al., 2007; Webb, 1989, 1997, 2011; Jennens, 2011). In Canada, several studies have documented the rapid growth in home schooling and explored parental motivations to home educate (Common and MacMullen, 1986; Luffman, 1997; Arai, 2000; Tator, 2001; Dahlquist, 2002; Fairchild, 2002; Brabant et al., 2003; Aurini and Davies, 2005).

Who chooses to home school their children?

A number of studies have explored the demographic information regarding home schooling families in the USA (Galen and Pitman, 1991; Ray, 1997; Lines, 2001; Bauman, 2002; Princiotta and Bielick, 2003). A body of studies indicate that in the USA context, the primary homeschooling educator is the mother (Lines, 1991;
Mayberry et al., 1995; Lyman, 1998; McDowell, 2000; Ray, 2000; Stevens, 2001). Studies show that among most homeschooling families, fathers tend to work in professional positions or be self-employed (Mayberry et al., 1995; Muncy, 1996; Wagenaar, 1997, cited in Kapitulik, 2011:8-9). Several scholars have found that the participants in the modern homeschooling movement in the USA context are white and wealthy, with over 95 per cent being white middle-class families and only less than one per cent, from black families (Galen and Pitman, 1991; Rudner, 1998; Ray, 2000; McDowell et al., 2000). As Lines (2001) describes, in the USA context, home schoolers are from all ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. However, their households seem to be conservative, religious, White, highly educated and two-parent families. Likewise Ray (2004) suggests that the homeschooling families are predominately two-parent households, white, middle-class and Christian. Princiotta and Bielick (2003) have observed that home-schooled students are more likely to be White and less likely to be Black or Hispanic when compared with public students. They also found that home-schooled children were more likely to be living in families with three or more children (ibid.).

Rudner (1999) found that 94 per cent of home schoolers were white, and 0.8 per cent were black and 0.2 per cent were Hispanic. In 1994, the data of the Current Population Survey indicated that 91 per cent of the home schoolers were white, 2.8 per cent were black and 4.4 per cent were Hispanic (Henke et al., 2000; Bauman, 2000). The data of the 1999 National Center for Education Statistics show that 75.3 per cent of the home schoolers were white (Ray, 1999; Bielick et al., 2001). The data from the 2003 NHES survey indicate that 77 per cent of home schoolers were white and about 72 per cent of homeschooling families were living in urban settings (Princiotta and Bieklick, 2006). Among the home schoolers, there are 9 per cent of home schoolers were black and 5 per cent of home schoolers are Hispanic (Planty et al., 2009). As Kunzman and Gaither (2013:11) argue, ‘while anecdotal reports frequently assert that the homeschool population is gaining racial diversity, the percentage of white homeschoolers has remained steady at approximately 75 per cent of the total population over the past twelve years of NHES surveys.’

The data from the 2003 NHES survey indicated that 50.3 per cent of homeschooling children were male and 49.7 per cent of homeschooling children were female. All grades K-12 were represented. There were 67.3 per cent in Grades 3-8 and 18 per cent in Grades 9-12. About 56 per cent of homeschooling children were aged between 9 and 13 years, with a total range of 5-18 years (Princiotta and Bieklick, 2006, cited in Jorgenson, 2011:28). As Jorgenson (2011:30) asserts, ‘although all grade levels are represented, the majority of students continue to be concentrated in the elementary grades, with decreasing numbers in the high school grades.’

The literature focusing on the family structure indicates that the home schoolers are almost exclusively two-parent families (Basham et al., 2007:12). Bielick et al. (2001:8, cited in Basham et al., 2007:12) has observed that more than 52 per cent of home-educated students have grown up in two-parent families in which only one parent works outside the home, compared to 19 per cent of non-home-schooled children.
The data of the 2003 National Center for Education Statistics Homeschooling Survey indicated that 81 per cent were two-parent households, compared to only 66 per cent of American families with children (US Census Bureau, 2003, cited in Basham et al., 2007:12). The data of US Census Bureau (2003) showed that in the USA, 62 per cent of homeschooling families had three or more children compared to 44 per cent of non-home-schooled families, while 56 percent of all American families with school-age children have only one or two children (US Census Bureau, 2003, cited in Basham et al., 2007:12). The data from the 2003 NHES survey showed that 88.8 per cent of homeschooling families were two-parent households, and 10.1 per cent of homeschooling families had one child, 28 per cent of families had two children and 62 per cent of families had three or more children (Princiotta and Bieklick, 2006).

Luebke (1999) investigated 47 homeschooling families in the state of Wisconsin and found that 42 per cent of the fathers held bachelor’s degrees or higher, 33 per cent of the mothers holding a bachelor’s degree (as cited in Jorgenson, 2011:28). Bieklick et al. (2001) provide further information about homeschooling families in the USA. They found that about 25 per cent of parents had a bachelor’s degree and 80 per cent of parents were two-parent families. Bauman (2002) found that on average, homeschooling parents seemed to be more educated. Dahlquist (2005) surveyed 205 homeschooling families in Minnesota and found that 44 per cent of the homeschooling parents held a bachelor’s degree and 38 per cent had college experience (as cited in Jorgenson, 2011:28). As Plany et al. (2009) indicate, the data from the NHES survey showed that consistent with the findings of the previous studies (Bielick et al., 2001), about 50 per cent of homeschool parents held at least a bachelor’s degree, while 43 per cent of the parents whose children studied at K-12 schools held a bachelor’s degree. Isenberg (2002) has observed that different levels of educational background seemed to be closely associated with the varying amounts of time that parents were engaged in the home schooling. The parents with a higher educational background seemed to be engaged in home schooling for a shorter time compared to those who held lower level of education. The data from the 2003 NHES survey show that 24.5 per cent of homeschooling parents had had no college education, 30.8 per cent of them had attended college and 44.6 per cent of parents held a bachelor’s degree or higher (Princiotta and Bieklick, 2006).

In the USA, several researchers have explored the family incomes of the homeschooling families (Rudner, 1999; Bielick et al., 2001; Belfield, 2002, 2004; Princiotta and Bieklick, 2006; Edward, 2007; Lips and Feingberg, 2008). As Ray (2004) claims, 95 per cent of homeschooling families were two-parent households with a typical annual income of between $25,000 and $49,000. Mayberry et al. (1995) found that 57 per cent of households earned an annual income of between $25,000 and $50,000 (as cited in Stevens, 2001). Rudner (1999) found that the annual income of the homeschooling families was likely to be higher compared with that of non-homeschooling families. Bieldfield et al. (2001:8) found that 65 per cent of homeschooling families had annual incomes of $50,000 or less. Green (2005:9) states that the annual income of homeschooling families was on average
over $50,000 and 66 per cent of the families had between two and three children. Edward (2007:73) found that homeschooling families were ‘predominantly well educated, Caucasian (81%), two-parents families (91%) living in a single-family home (96%) in a suburban area (59%) with an annual income level of $50,000 or more (68%) and fifty-eight percent of these households had two or three children in the home’. It was also recognised that the families with a higher annual income might send their children to study at private schools (Belfield, 2004). Meanwhile, Belfield (2004:5) has observed the families with lower incomes are less likely to choose to home educate their children since they are less able to afford for one parent to leave work to stay home with the children. As Belfield (2004:5) asserts, homeschooling families are ‘in the middle of the distribution of household incomes: when household income falls below a certain threshold, both parents must work; when it rises above a threshold, private schooling options can be financed more readily.’ Lips and Feingberg (2008:3) found that ‘children from families with annual household incomes below $75,000 were more likely to be homeschooled than children with families who earned more than that amount each year’. In the USA context, Belfield (2004:9) claims that the homeschooling families most capable of practising home schooling for a reasonable length of time are ‘typically two-parent, middle-income families with mothers who are not in full-time employment.’ As Princiotta and Bielick (2003) claim, homeschooling children were more likely to have only one parent in the work force (54%) when compared to 20 per cent of public school students. In Canada, Faris (2006:15) claims that ‘almost 70 percent of Canadian homeschooling families live with an annual household income of less than $ 65,000 and two-thirds of the homeschooling households report having only one income earner’. Van Pelt (2003:38) found that ‘almost a third of homeschooling mothers do generate income, and a full one-third of those women are employed more than 15 hours per week’ (Van Pelt, 2003:38, cited in Basham et al., 2007:12). The data from the 2003 NHES survey revealed that 21.7 per cent of homeschooling families had household incomes of about $75,001, 24.1 per cent of families had household incomes of between $50,000 and $75,000, 28.4 per cent had household incomes of between $25,000 and $50,000, and 25.8 per cent of families had household incomes of less than $25,000 (Princiotta and Bielick, 2006).

Several scholars have recognised the changes in the demographic diversity of home schooling (Knowles, 1988; Wahisi, 1995; Welner and Welner, 1999; Nazareno, 1999; McDowell et al., 2000; Bielick et al., 2001; Princiotta and Bielick, 2003; Holt, 2004; Line, 2000; Stevens, 2001; Romanowski, 2006; Ray, 2007; MacFarquhar, 2008; Ray, 2010, 2011, 2013). The participants in home schooling are from a diversity of cultural and religious backgrounds (Kaseman and Kaseman, 1999; Welner and Welner, 1999; McDowell et al., 2000). Livni (2000) recognised that with the dramatic growth of home schooling over the past decades, home schooling has changed from being the exclusive preserve of the families with a Christian background. Van Galen (1988) has observed that homeschooling parents range from those with liberal to those holding strongly liberal ideological views and include atheists and libertarians.
These non-religiously motivated parents have made the decision to home school because they believe that they are able to provide better education for their children than the school can. Princiotta and Bieklick (2003) noticed a change in terms of demographic information associated with homeschooling families, with the addition of parents who were less educated and were single parents. Line (2000) recognised the rapid growth of home schooling among minority groups. As Holt (2004) states, home schoolers are not only from cities, but also from country areas, suburbs and small towns. Several scholars have found that home-schooled children came from a diversity of family backgrounds: some of them came from wealthy and well educated families, and some children’s families were not well educated or wealthy (Farris and Woodruff, 2000; Bielick et al., 2001). Ray (2007:2) identified the fact that not only Christians, but also agnostics, atheists, Buddhists, Jews, Mormons, Muslims and New Agers all chose to educate their children at home. It was found that Muslim-Americans seem to be among the fastest growing sub-groups of home educators in the USA (Bauman, 2001; Byfield, 2001; USDOE, 2005; MacFarquhar, 2008). As Romanowski (2001:79) states, ‘One of the most fascinating facts of this educational movement is that today’s homeschooling families represent a diverse sampling of the American population.’

The motivations for home schooling

An extensive body of literature has focused on the factors determining parental motivation to home school in the USA (Knowles, 1988; Van Galen, 1988; Mayberry and Knowles, 1989; Knowles et al., 1992; Knowles et al., 1994; Angelis, 1998; Mondloch, 2000; Hadderman, 2002; Collom, 2005; Green and Hoover-Dempsey, 2007) and in Canada (Luffman, 1997; Arai, 2000). As Collom (2005) argues, the literature in relation to home schooling illustrates the fact that parental motivations to home school have changed over time. The literature from the 1980s supports the claim that such motivations can be divided into two major groups: ‘ideologues’ (Van Galen, 1988) and ‘pedagogues’ (Mayberry and Knowles, 1989). In the view of Van Galen (1988), ideological homeschooling families emphasise both family and conservative values; consequently, these families are in conflict with schools in terms of values. As Mayberry and Knowles (1989) claim, pedagogical home educators are likely to be motivated by a conflict with schools and they prefer to educate their children using more desirable pedagogic approaches.

With the rapid and notable growth of the homeschooling movement throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the literature indicates that parental motivations seem to have become more diverse. In addition to pedagogical and ideological reasons, several studies have found that many parents’ decision to home school is due to racism (Caldwell, 1999; Romm, 1993; Safley, 1998; Ray, 1990, 1997, 2000). Romm (1993) found that a variety of families in the USA were practising home education in order to transmit specific ethnic values to their children. Mayberry (1988) and Chopp (2003) have observed that home educators choose to home school because
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home education is able to meet children’s physical needs, specific learning needs, or the needs of gifted children (Lange and Liu, 1999; Pearson, 2002; Lubienski, 2003). Hadderman (2002) summarised the primary reasons for parents to choose home schooling as follows: religion, promotion of a family bond, teaching what the child wants to learn, the special needs of the child. Dahlquist (2005) claims that despite religious motivation, other main reasons that homeschooling parents reported include ‘being unhappy with the socialisation in schools and having the ability to apply more hands-on teaching and learning’ (as cited in Jorgenson, 2011:33). Collum (2005, cited in Anthony, 2009:10) has observed four main reasons that parents choose to home educate, including ‘dissatisfaction with public schools, academic and pedagogical concerns, religious values, and family needs.’ Montes (2006) recognises several important motivations for home schooling, which include religious conviction, better education at home, and poor learning environment at school. McKeon (2007:130) has observed that the primary reasons for parents to choose to home educate include academic reasons (69.7%), efficacy (46.9%) and religion (40.7%). Several researchers have found that a growing number of American parents who choose to home educate had a desire to enhance the centrality of the family and strengthen the parent-child relationship (Knowles, 1991; Steven, 2001; Brabant et al., 2003; Dahlquist et al., 2006; Kunzman, 2009, 2010). As Knowles (1991: 207) states, ‘All were highly motivated to promote the wellbeing of family and had strong community relationships, particularly within the context of their religious interests.’ The literature summarises the parents’ primary motivations to choose to home education with respect to four aspects, namely, pedagogical beliefs, ideological beliefs, negative experiences with public schools and addressing their child’s learning needs and interests (Humphrey, 1999; Tator, 2002, McLoughlin and Chambers, 2004; Valee and Boyd, 2004; Green, 2005).

The data from the 1999 NHES survey show that 49.5 per cent of parents reported their primary motivation to home educate was to provide their children with better education; 38.4 per cent reported religious reasons; and 25.6 per cent chose to home school their children because their children’s poor learning environment at school (Basham, 2001). Data from the 2003 NHES show that 30 per cent of home educators stated that their primary motivation was to provide religious or moral instruction; 31 per cent were concerned about the environment of conventional schools (safety, drugs, negative peer pressure); 16 per cent expressed dissatisfaction with academic instruction at other schools; 7 per cent gave the reason that their child had physical or mental health problems; 7 per cent made the choice because their child had other special needs (Princiotta and Bielick, 2006:14). The results of the surveys in relation to the primary reasons that parents chose to home educate show that 85 per cent of the parents reported that ‘concern about the environment of other schools’ was related to their decision, 68 per cent presented that ‘dissatisfaction with academic instruction’ was related to their choices, and 72 per cent answered that ‘to provide religious or moral instruction’ is relevant to their choices (Princiotta and Bielick, 2003:14). In brief, three primary reasons that homeschoolers gave for choosing to home educate
in the US were given, namely, concern about the institutional environment, desire to transfer their own religious or moral values, and disagreement with the academic instruction provided in schools (ibid.).

In the Canadian context, the primary reasons that parents gave for educating their children at home included transferring specific values to their children; and providing their children with the instruction which is suitable for their particular learning interests and learning styles (Van Pelt, 2003:49). Brabant et al. (2007:11) investigated the motivations of Canadian homeschooling families, and they found that the parents commonly had the desire ‘to pursue a family educational project; an objection to the organizational structure of the school system; to offer curriculum enrichment; and a preoccupation with their children’s socio-affective development’ (Brabant et al., 2007:11).

In Australia, a number of scholars have examined Australians’ motivations to home educate their children (Barratt-Peacock, 1997, 2003; Chapman and O’Donoghue, 2000; Reilly et al., 2002; Harding, 2003; Stroobant, 2006; Jackson, 2009). The primary reasons were categorised and documented as follows: disagreement with formal institutional education, transmission of specific beliefs and values to their children; maintenance of a close family relationship; the positive attractions of home education; ensuring the achievement of high academic results; satisfying specific educational needs of children and so on.

Scholars have found several major reasons, including dissatisfaction with public schools, religious preferences, and because of racism (Ray, 1991; Caldwell, 1999), transmitting specific cultural norms and ethnic values (Romm, 1993). Gladin (1987) and Wartes (1988:46) refer to several other influential reasons, for example, ‘to have more control over what my children learn’, ‘to reduce the effect of peer pressure’, ‘to improve the quality of our family life’; ‘to be able to spend more time with my children’, ‘to avoid peer pressure’, ‘greater parent-child contact’ and ‘to enable better self concept’ (Wartes, 1988:46). Mayberry et al. (1995) summarised and documented four primary motivations for parents to choose to educate their child at home, which include religious, academic and social development and alternative lifestyle. The results of the 2003 NHES survey reveals that the parents of around 31 per cent of home-schooled children chose to teach them at home because of their concerns about such issues as safety, drugs or negative peer pressure, while 30 per cent of parents reported the most important reason was to provide religious or moral instruction (Lawrence, 2007:2).

Cai et al. (2002:372) summarise the major influential factors involved in the process of parents’ decision-making and these include ‘curriculum secularization, family-school values conflicts, school harassment and violence, exposure to peer pressure that advocates drugs and premarital sex, a desire to strengthen the family’. Collom (2008:3) categorises the motivations under four broad headings: academic/pedagogical concerns, religious values concerns, general dissatisfaction with the public schools, and family lifestyle reasons. Saba and Gattis (2002:1-2) list the primary reasons that parents decide to home school as religious convictions, removing their
teenage children from an uncomfortable environment, pursuing family togetherness and spending a lot of time with children, pursuing educational excellence, helping children with special needs, feeling that their children are underserved, and personal educational philosophy. Basham et al. (2007:10-11) summarised several motivations of Canadian and American home schoolers as follows: to cultivate a specific set of beliefs and values; to achieve higher academic results through one-on-one instruction; to develop closer and stronger parent-child relationships; to provide their children with the chance of experiencing high-quality interaction with peers and adults; the lack of discipline in public schools; avoiding negative peer pressure; the high fees for private schools; a physically safer environment where children could study.

How to manage the home schooling?

A number of studies have focused attention on the exploration of the teaching style used in home schooling (Meighan and Meighan, 1991; Medlin, 1994; Meighan, 1996; Thomas, 1998, 2000; Simich, 1998; Griffith, 1999; Anderson, 2000; Butler, 2000; Romanowski, 2001; Davenport, 2001; Lowe and Thomas, 2002; Pearson, 2002; Saba and Gattis, 2002; Huber, 2003; Trevaskis, 2005; Hoffman, 2006; Klein, 2006; McKeon, 2007; Anthony, 2009). Medlin (1994, cited in McKeon, 2007:36) found that 61 per cent of the homeschooling parents surveyed reported that they used the traditional methods and 82 per cent of them used structured approaches in their practice of home schooling. Davenport (2001) conducted research to examine the ways in which parents practise home schooling in New Jersey. Davneport (2001, cited in McKeon, 2007:36) revealed that homeschooling parents primarily used direct tutorial instruction or individual work activities. Lowe and Thomas (2002:45) found that the majority of homeschooling families have periods of both informality and structure in the arrangement of their home education. Ray (2002) reviewed the relevant studies and claimed that the homeschooling parents adopted a diversity of approaches in the process of practising home schooling. As Ray (2002:37) explains, ‘the learning programme is flexible and highly individualised, involving both homemade and purchased curriculum materials.’ Lowe and Thomas (2002:10) claim that the homeschooling ‘parents use a variety of methods and approaches. These range from formal, structured arrangements to informal approaches which are completely child-led’. Clements (2002) conducted an in-depth qualitative study among three homeschooling families and explored their selection of curriculum materials in their home schooling. Clements (2002) found that the homeschooling parents reported using direct instruction in their teaching, however, it varied depending on the needs of the child, educational goals and the age of a child. He also identified the fact that the families surveyed used computerised and video curricula. Clements (2002) also documented and summarised four primary types of curricula that were commonly used by homeschooling families, including textbook-based (prepackaged) curriculum, literature-based (parent-designed) curriculum, computer-based curriculum, video/satellite-based curriculum and unschooling curriculum.
(as cited in McKeon, 2007:36). Huber (2003) found that some homeschooling families used a teacher-structured approach or school-at-home approach in their home schooling, while some families chose solely to use the learner-structured approach which regards children as interest-driven learners and advocates that they should develop their own learning experience (as cited in McKeon, 2007:37). Huber’s (2003) study also reveals several teaching strategies and approaches, namely, instruction-based skills, traditional classroom instruction, classical education writing instruction, learner-structured instruction and unschooling methodology (as cited in McKeon, 2007:38). Holt (2004:3) provides further information about how the homeschooling families practise home education on a day-to-day basis. He states, ‘Homeschooling children learn through reading, through conversation, through play, through outside classes, through volunteer work and apprenticeships’ (Holt, 2004:3). Klein (2006) states that while some home educators use a structured teaching pedagogy, some parents prefer to choose a more relaxed and flexible learning style.

Studies indicate that home educators have rich curricula which are available for them to use in the process of practising home schooling (Martin, 1997; Knowles, 1991, Pearson, 2002; Anderson, 2000; Walsh, 2002; Holt and Farenga, 2003; Princiotto and Bielick, 2006; Lips and Feinberg, 2009). Anderson (2000) found that the rapid growth of modern home schooling had resulted in an increase in the curricula of home schooling, ranging from independently created to packaged commercially produced curricula (Holt and Farenga, 2003). Butler (2000) has observed that parents can freely choose a teaching style and select curriculum which meets their educational and personal objectives (as cited in Jorgenson, 2011:35). Lowe and Thomas (2002) find that the home-schooled students played an important role in the selection of the curriculum. Several other studies show that home-educated children are able to be actively involved in decision making relation to the education (Werle, 2001; Lowe and Thomas, 2002; Ray, 2002). This argument is strongly supported by the finding of studies in the UK, where, for example, as Meighan (1996:2) claims, ‘learner-managed learning (autonomous education) is at present more frequently found in home-based education.’ McKeon (2007:40) reviewed the relevant literature and claims that in home schooling, the majority of parents used direct one-on-one instructional practices with their children.

Several scholars have explored the types of curriculum that were used in the home school (Martin, 1997; Kozlowski, 1999; Scheps, 1999; Luebke, 1999; Duffey, 2002; McKeon, 2007; Lips and Feinberg, 2009). Martin (1997) summarises the primary resources from which the homeschooling parents can choose a curriculum, which include home-school conventions, home-school magazines, state and local home-school groups and books (as cited in Anthony, 2009:30). Ray (1997) investigated 1,657 families’ choices of curriculum and found that 71.1 per cent of the parents reported that they designed their own curricula, while 24 per cent of them bought a complete curriculum package. Kozlowski (1999) categorised the types of family and their choice of curriculum into three groups: the homeschooling families, whose
children intended to return to public schools from the home schooling in the future, were likely to use the same curricula and textbooks as those of the public schools; some parents purchased and used published curricula; the unschoolers did not use formal curricula but only materials which fulfilled their child’s interests and needs (as cited in Jorgenson, 2011:39). Luebke (1999, cited in Jorgenson 2011:39) found that 34 per cent of the parents used traditional textbooks and assignments when teaching at least part of their curriculum, 13 per cent used Advanced Training Institute (ATI), 10 per cent used unit studies organised around a common theme, and 6 per cent used unschooling in which curriculum was directed by a child’s interests. Duffey (2002, cited in Jorgenson, 2011:39) found that among the 121 families surveyed, 58 per cent of the parents used a parent-designed curriculum, 23 per cent used a packaged curriculum, 6 per cent used the curriculum provided by a public or private school and 11 per cent used other types of curriculum.

The data from the 2003 NHES survey show that 78 per cent of the homeschooling parents used a public library to obtain the teaching materials; 77 per cent bought materials from a home-school catalogue, publisher, or individual specialist; 69 per cent used a retail bookstore or other stores; 60 per cent used an education publisher not affiliated to the home schooling; 41 percent of the parents used distance learning (Princiotta and Bielick, 2006). McKeon (2007:92) recognised the close relationship between homeschooling styles and the choices of curricula and found that the majority of the homeschoolers surveyed used a balanced approach. However, it was found that 56.8 per cent of traditional homeschoolers tended to use a structured phonics curriculum, whereas only 2 per cent of unschoolers used a phonics curriculum (McKeon, 2007:92). Anthony (2009:251) provides further information about the selection of the curriculum, reporting that the primary resources that the homeschooling families surveyed relied on were from the cooperative. In the view of Anthony (2009:254), ‘the cooperative was instrumental to the parents’ ability to provide the classical education. It also helped address some of the problems associated with home schooling.’

Several researchers have attempted to document and summarise teaching approaches that the homeschooling families usually employed in their day-to-day home education (Griffith, 1999; Hoffman, 2006; McKeon, 2007; Anthony, 2009; Taylor-Hough, 2010; Jorgenson). Ray (2000) lists out several teaching strategies that have been successfully used in the home schooling (e.g. The Teaching Home, 2000), namely:

1. Classical. Parents teach specific tools in how to learn so that they may be used when studying any subject;
2. Lifestyle of learning. Teaching and learning are seen as a natural part of living within the community and nation;
3. Schooling at home. Teaching occurs with a high degree of structure and in a similar manner to that of the public school where students complete daily assignments and their work is evaluated and graded; subject areas are not integrated;
4. Structured/mastery learning. Material is presented in a sequential, step-by-step format from booklets or the computer with an emphasis on immediate feedback to the learner;

5. Unit studies. Proposes that all knowledge is interrelated and if presented and studied in a related manner will be learned more easily and remembered longer; teaching is centred around a common theme and subject areas are often taught together;

6. Unschooling. Children are given freedom to explore and learn in areas of interests;

7. Worldview. The idea behind this approach is that education is value and belief driven and therefore the curricula, materials and activities will integrate a particular worldview.


Hoffman (2006) categorises home schooling into four types, that is: structured learning, distance learning, eclectic learning and unschooling. McKeon (2007:15) lists several teaching approaches used by the homeschooling families in the USA. The popular homeschooling methods include unschooling, classical, traditional and eclectic. McKeon (2007:15) describes them as follows:

1. Traditional. This style is also known as the ‘box curriculum’ and is the most common type of approach to homeschooling.

2. Unschooling. This style can be defined as one that focuses upon the choices made by the individual learner.

3. Eclectic. This style is more relaxed or laid back type of homeschool. Parents use a mixed combination of boxed curriculum, homemade curriculum, and/or individualised curriculum. They can operate as borderline unschooling or borderline school-at-home, or anywhere in between and be considered eclectic.

4. Classical. The core of Classical Education is the trivium, a teaching model that seeks to tailor the subject matter to a child’s cognitive development.


Griffith (1999) states that the parents often use an eclectic teaching strategy when they mix and match methods to meet the needs of the child (as cited in Jorgenson, 2011:36). McKeon (2007:81) found that 69.5 per cent of home schoolers surveyed were identified as being eclectic home schoolers. As McKeon (2007:131) claims, most parents preferred the eclectic style of home schooling to any other style, including unschooling, traditional or classical. He also points out that eclectic home schoolers were more likely to use the facilitative style (44%) of home schooling than any of the other teaching styles (McKeon, 2007:134). McKeon (2007:132) also found that of the 21 families interviewed, seven out of the 12 parents who started out as traditional home schoolers had evolved into eclectic home schoolers. McKeon (2007:132) took this point further, suggesting that the parents were changing teaching methods in line with the perceived needs of their children. Anthony (2009) conducted an in-depth