

Introduction to Special Issue: Out of School Education

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We have gladly accepted the invitation to be guest editors for the Autumn 2010 volume of the International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education (IEJEE), which is entitled: “*Out of school education*”. In this volume we present recent contributions to home education research. The team of authors in the journal represents not only the interdisciplinarity of the contemporary home education research but also its internationality. The six contributors come from five different countries and we are glad to have been able to include some new voices in this group.

The overarching topic in this volume is: *Home education between human rights and fundamentalism*. Modern home education, understood as obligated education of children that the parents take responsibility for, as an alternative to school, started about 50 years ago. In the early 1980s we find the beginning of a distinct home education research which has rapidly increased since then. This research is mostly done by researchers from the US, England and Canada on home education in their respective countries. The main focus, as we see it, has been to document (and legitimate) the phenomenon of home education and its development. Central topics are legal questions, motives, numbers of home educated students, learning results and socialization.

The two terms “human right” and “fundamentalism” in the subtitle mark the wide range of judgments concerning home education. The national regulations, the public opinion and the positions of those who deal professionally with this topic differ remarkably. Some believe that the

freedom to choose home education is anchored in the convention on human rights; others consider home education as part of a fundamentalist worldview and lifestyle. All contributions in this issue address the contradiction between the “human right” and the “fundamentalism” perspective, in different ways.

Franz Reimer analyses the relation between human rights and home education based on the situation in Germany. Home education is not allowed there as an alternative to public schooling. He looks at the role of the Convention on Human rights in the discussion about public schooling and home education. Reimer argues for a modification of the judicial and statutory approach in Germany, towards a more flexible and liberal practice.

Robert Kunzman’s focus is based on his research on home education in the US at the other end of the formerly mentioned range. He analyses the relationship between homeschooling and religious fundamentalism. Although the home education movement in the US is very diverse, the largest subset is the category of conservative Christians. Kunzman describes in detail several intersections of homeschooling and fundamentalism. Through this he contributes to the question as to why home education is sometimes seen as a fundamentalist movement.

The article by Yvonne Kostelecká gives insight into home education in the Czech Republic. Up until now the international home education research contains little about this movement, though the developments regarding homeschooling after the breakdown of the communist system in the Czech Republic are very unique. Her description of the developments presents the interesting process in which educational authorities seek an answer to the question as to whether home education has to be seen as a fundamentalist approach or rather as a legitimate alternative. The particularity of the Czech approach is the experimental phase that has been started in search of an adequate regulation of home education.

The three last articles deal more or less with parental motives for home education. The impression the public has of home education is influenced by its general perceptions of the reasons that parents have for choosing it.

Ruth Morton gives her viewpoint based on data from the UK which offers insight into the diversity within the home education movement. She argues that it is necessary to go beyond stereotypical dichotomies of what motivates parents to home educate.

Thomas Spiegler presents a meta-analysis of 12 studies about parent’s motives for home education. He discusses the question in the context of how far the social framework and the research instruments influence the presented picture of parent’s motives for home education.

Christian Beck presents data about parents' attitudes towards home education in Norway. He argues that changes in the social framework, especially in the school system, might lead to an increasing rate of parents who would be able to consider home education for their children, at least for a limited period. Based on this background he discusses the limitations and consequences of current developments in the schooling system.

Contradictions, like the one indicated in the terms "human right" and "fundamentalism", determine the reality of home education in different locations. The legal framework around it varies greatly around the world. In some areas the trend goes towards the normalization of home education as an educational alternative. In other places it is a marginalized and more or less illegal practice. Parental motives are also very diverse and the anthropological and pedagogical perspectives of the homeschoolers seem at times to be opposed to one another. At the moment nothing indicates that this is going to change anytime soon. The field of education has especially been an area of very different and conflictive approaches for centuries.

However, the terms "human right" and "fundamentalism" do not have to be only seen as contradictory. A critical view on the debate about home education also raises the question: To what extent should it be regarded as a human right to adopt a particular approach, conviction or ideology towards education which is different from the majority, who may consider it as strange, threatening or fundamentalist? That this question can be answered in different ways is indicated by the fact that contemporary societies differ remarkably in their ability to deal with diversity.

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