Home education: The social motivation

Christian W. BECK[*]

University of Oslo, Norway

Abstract

Data from a Norwegian survey show correlation between a student's socially related problems at school and the parent's social motivation for home education. I argue that more time spent at school by a student could result in more socially related problems at school, which can explain an increase in social motivation for home education.

Keywords: home education, homeschooling, social school-problems, parents` motives.

Introduction

A question concerning extended school-time and home education are raised and discussed in this article: Will expanding time spent in school for students and decreasing time spent in everyday life result in more socially motivated home education? A social motive is here defined as related to a deficiency in the student's social frames and ones other than more personal motives like pedagogical and religious (life-orientation) motives, such as socially related problems at school and parents who want to spend more time with their children.

Is there a limit to school-growth?

Informal education with individual and societal concerns twined together in everyday life was the long historical starting period of schooling. For a long time after the first educational law was put into effect in Norway in 1739, there was lack of schools in rural areas and therefore home education was allowed and practised (Tveit, 2004).

[*] Correspondence: Christian W. Beck, University of Oslo, Department of Educational Research, Pb 1092, Blindern, 0317 Oslo, Norway. Phone: +4722855397. E-Mail: c.w.beck@ped.uio.no

The school expanded. The age at which children start school has now been lowered all over Europe. Today, the enrolment of 4 year-old children in pre-school education in European countries has been increasing. More years and hours per day spent in school are seen quite uncritically as a positive development by national authorities in modern countries (European Union 2009).

Today we can talk about a new pedagogical mainstream in school. The new can be described in three points:

a) *Increased range* – More time spent in school both in terms of the years of an individual's life and in hours a day spent in school.

b) *Socialization* – More focus on socialization and identity issues.

c) *Testing* – Testing and testable knowledge have a priority not only in reading, mathematics and natural and social science, but also in social skills.

Wealthy, modern countries with a high level of economic development have the most developed school systems and the best results on OECD's (Organization for Economical Co-operation and Development's) international PISA knowledge tests in reading, mathematics and natural science. It is especially the countries that are somewhat wealthy that have to mobilize their educational system out of necessity to get new economic development which score high on PISA tests (OECD 2007a and b), such as Finland, who had best PISA test results. USA and Norway stand out with the highest economic development in OECD, but have relatively low PISA test results. The modernization of societies has been connected to an increase in time spent in school. Have the USA and Norway passed a peak for positive school growth and will Finland and other modern countries with high PISA test results soon pass the same point (figure 1)?
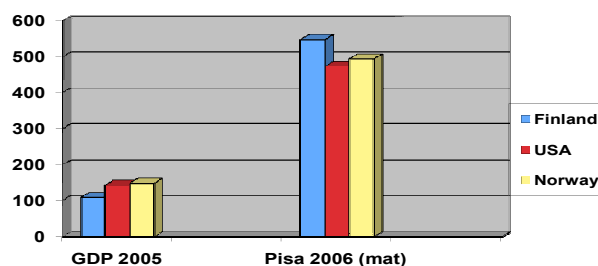

Figure1. PISA test results in mathematics (2006) and economical development (2005)*

*Measure of economic development: Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita (OECD, 2007b).

Both the need for more workers and low wages will push parents out into paid work to a high degree and as a consequence push their children into more time spent at school. Students have to stay in school all the time during the day when their parents are at work. The student's everyday life issues then become socially related school issues.

Why did Finland get Pisa test results that were so much better than Norway's, for example? Finland had serious economic crises after World War II and when the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1989. A national economy depending on education, analytic knowledge hegemony and good PISA test results characterize schools in Finland.

In Norway the situation is different. Norwegian schools are not placed with its back to the wall in order to guarantee the national economy as they are in Finland. Norway has a highly developed school system and a high level of formal education amongst its citizens. Norway's oil-based economy has created an economic foundation both for more time spent in school and for an educational system which is more independent of the economic system. This gives three possible explanations for poor Norwegian PISA test results (Beck, 2009):

1. *Comfort* – Norway takes a high level of economic development for granted. Oil production made Norwegians rich. The demand for manpower is great. You don't need much education to get a job; therefore motivation for receiving a school education is lowered. The 30 % drop out rate by Norwegian upper secondary-school students could be a rational choice (Markussen, 2008). Working class boys may think that the academic middle class culture in school gives them nothing. They perhaps leave school to work, learn to work and to earn money.

2. *More time spent in school* – This gives school an extended agenda of socialization, which seems to take time and effort away from learning objective knowledge. There is no evidence to support the claim that more time spent in school results in more teaching time and better learning results (Cuban, 2008). In Norway, teachers are given so much documentation work to do and socialization tasks that the result is less time and energy for teaching. The result is that the quality of schools gets worse (Henriksen & Vik, 2008). Consequently, the learning of objective knowledge sometimes turns into a new responsibility for parents. Paradoxically, with more time spent in school for children, parents could be forced in to using some kind of "home education".

3. *New knowledge* – In Norwegian schools today, there is more focus on new interpretative knowledge in the direction of human understanding, socio-cultural communication and new creative projects and less on analytical skills in mathematics and natural science and on practical knowledge. When analytic knowledge dominates PISA tests, this could explain Norwegian students' low scores on such tests.

Home education and its social framing

Socio-cultural conflicts and home education

Different groups of home educators seem to represent broader segments of school critics and broader socio-cultural groups.

In all countries with home education we find more or less these four groups. The groups overlap. The first two groups are the most distinct and researched

1. *Structured* – Home educators, who are frequently religious, conservative, well educated middle class parents. They are what Basil Bernstein (1977) calls role- and position-oriented in their pedagogical codes and often practice structured school oriented home education with a priority on analytical objective knowledge.

2. *Unschooling* – Home educators who are frequently well educated middle class parents, anti-establishment, with radical political and cultural viewpoints. They are what Bernstein calls person- and identity-oriented (ibid). They often practice child-centered, natural learning home education with priority placed on cultural creativity and new interpretative and communicative knowledge.

3. *Pragmatic* – Often rural, working class home educators. The parents have limited formal education. They emphasize home education anchored in practical work.

4. *Unknown* – Different groups of home educators which more or less are all not registered with the authorities or known: This could consist of radical unschoolers; gypsies (romanis); unknown immigrants; socially troubled families who sometimes have substance abuse problems; and extreme fundamentalist religious families. Some of these are serious about home education, but others appear to use home education as an excuse for self-imposed isolation from society.

These four home education groups represent more general social groups also inside school, who have different sorts and degrees of socio-cultural conflicts with both school and the national state (Hoëm, 1978). With more student-time in school, both the substance and the degree of such

conflicts could produce more social school problems and then could give social motivation for home education added to possible personal motives.

Structured home educators are in conflict with school and the state mostly over religious issues. Unschoolers are in broader pedagogical and cultural conflicts with both school and state. The moderate main part of these two middle class home education groups however also share many common political interests with the national state and they home educate mostly out of specific positive defined ideological and pedagogical reasons. Among the more radical in these two groups, especially the religious in the first group, processes of inner orientation could give added social reasons to home educate. They find support among their own people, against school and state.

Pragmatic working class home educators have conflicts with school and the national state both in cultural and political issues. Such conflicts could be unarticulated social class conflicts. These home educators often start their home education as urgent solutions of concrete conflicts with school.

There is little information about unknown home educators, but they are supposed to be strongly in conflict both with the schools and the state. Some of the unregistered home education seems to be more a withdrawal from society than home education. An estimated 40 % of home educators in Quebec, Canada, are not registered (Brabant, Bourdon, & Sutras, 2004) and in Norway it is 65 % (Beck, 2009).

If we here add other out-of-school groups the number increases dramatically. In Oslo, the number of children not registered in school increased 600 % in ten years (1999-2009) to 2.5 % of the actual student population (ibid). A majority of these children are unregistered immigrants.

Everyday life and education

A redefinition of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann's (1975) concept of *everyday life* is: participation in family, community and elsewhere with a low level of formal institutionalisation and authority control. In everyday life we mainly act with what the English sociologist Margaret Archer (2003) call first-person-authority. In such acts the person's free will makes a difference.

More of the everyday life of children spent as time in school stresses the socialization possibilities expected from everyday life. The imbalance between time used in everyday life and in formal educational institutions could disturb the overall conditions both for a student's knowledge learning and socialization.

When extended school participation sometimes reduces the everyday life of students under an accepted minimum, the move towards home education is an understandable reaction. This reaction can go too far, but home education is a strong message about the loss of everyday life in modern societies.

The solution seems neither to be entrenchment in a minimized everyday life of the students nor in an over extended school. Most parents want to reconstitute the balance between everyday life and formal educational participation for their children, but in their own way. Some parents, both with children inside and outside school want flexible and open solutions that include some school and some home education. They don't want to exclude school totally, but they try to avoid what some call "the organized madness".

Although home education is an individual choice, home educators want to cooperate. Even in Norway, where few home educated students are spread out in a scarcely populated country and with almost no organization for home education, 40% of the home educators have regular contact with other home educators (Beck, 2006).

Social bridging in education

There is opening towards social practices outside school in modern educational processes.

Apple (2008) points out how social movements and populist groups like home educators affect and change public schools' curriculum in USA. De Calvahro (2001) shows how openness to community as important to counteract the negative consequences of school growth. Ivan Illich's (1972) ideas about deschooling and Paulo Freires pedagogy of the oppressed (1970) could be added here with new actuality. Both the Russian Externate, a restricted, test related offer of teaching (Fladmoe, 2004) and primary and secondary education given as adult education (Stølen, 2007) are learner-managed educational options with a low degree of institutionalization in a middle position between school and home education, where education is seen in a more lifelong perspective.

The same opening is also seen as ideological and institutional bridging between modern home education, other out-of-school pedagogy and school pedagogy. The common essence that constitutes such bridging is found in concepts like situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 2003), uncoiling (Holt, 1991), learner-managed learning (Khulna, 2006), in informal learning (Thomas, 2002) and progressive education (Dewey, 1997). This essence can be summed up in the Danish philosopher K.E. Løgstrup`s (1994) concept of *life-enlightenment*: *Enlightenment of the existence we have with and toward each other, of heaven, the device of society and the passage of history.*

This bridging gives a new social space in education. When school does not take advantage of such social sur plus possibilities in education and home education does, such possibilities can add new social arguments to home education.

IT not only offers new forms of individual freedom in education, but also new national and international governance where bureaucratic factors such as plans, tests and documentation expand (Krüger, 2007). Modern

schools today are under a top to bottom social-technocratic regime, where power to a high degree is displaced from teachers, parents, students, schools and communities, to experts and central governance. Such processes can negatively affect basic freedom and narrow the social space in education inside school and give reasons to find out-of-school educational options like home education.

New motives for home education

Documented categories of parent's primary motives for choosing home education exist that originate in the first decades of modern home education. Two classical attempts to categorizing motives to home educate are found in Mayberry (1988) and Van Galen (1988). Mayberry describes four motivational categories: religious, academic, social (students are better off, in terms of social factors, at home than at school), and New Age (alternative lifestyle). Van Galen distinguishes between ideological and pedagogical home educators. Ideological home educators emphasize both family and conservative values, and are motivated by a disagreement with schools in terms of values; they are often loosely referred to as religious fundamentalists. Pedagogical home educators consider breaking with institutional schooling combined with practicing more desirable pedagogic approaches. Mayberry and especially Van Galen seem to have described what motivates middle class home education, both the structured and unschooling.

Nearly 20 years after Mayberry and Van Galen's studies we can observe interesting signs of change in motivation for home education in Norway. In a research survey (2006): "Parents view of school" a representative sample of Norwegian parents with children as students in Norwegian compulsory school (6 to 16 years) (N = 564) were asked about their opinion of school (Beck & Vestre, 2008).

One question about home education was:

> ***Do you for a period of time want to give your child home education?***
> Answers: NO = 83.2% (462)
> IN DOUBT = 6.5% (36)
> YES = 10.3% (57)
> (Beck & Vestre, 2008).

The 10.3 % that answered "yes" represents about 60,000 students of the compulsory school population in Norway. Today, only about 400 (0.06 %) students are home educated (Beck & Vestre, 2008). For each home educated student there could potentially be 166 more. Not many of the 10.3 % who answered "yes" will start to home educate in the near future. However, the results demonstrate that many parents are considering out-of-school options like home education for their children's education. Home education, an almost unknown option for parents 10 years ago, is today a possibility

parents know about and have in mind when they answers such questionnaires. The parents that answered "yes" come from all social classes, but more specifically when the student is in private school and the father is not working full-time.

The survey documents rather positive general opinions about home education in larger groups of parents when 41 % of the parents are more or less positive to the question "Is home education a human right?" and 64 % are more or less positive to "Should home education have public economical support?" But the majority of parents seem to want home education under public control when 78 % are more or less positive to the question "Should the curriculum in home education be as in school?"

The parents were asked for their motivation to want to home educate for a period (Table 1).

Table 1. *Motives to want home education for a period in 2006*

Motives to want HE	Number (%)
Problems with school	26 (46)
Want more time with my child at home	23 (40)
Pedagogical reasons	22 (38)
Religious reasons	4 (7)
Other reasons	20 (34)

$n = 57$, some parents mention more than one motive. (Beck & Vestre, 2008)

Only 7 % of the possible home education motives would be for religious ones. This is a strong decrease from 2002/03 when 30% of Norwegian home education was religiously motivated (Beck, 2006). The pure pedagogical school motives are more or less the same in 2006 (38%) as they were in 2002/03 (40%).

The top two motives in 2006 are both social (46% and 40 %). Even if these two motives to some degree overlap, there is remarkable increase in possible social motives for home education in 2006 compared with the 16 % who home educated based on social motives in 2002/03.

Parents who chose home education as an option are more concerned about bullying, absence of their child's well being at school, bad relationships to teachers and their child's social development than the other parents. They are not, however, more concerned than other parents about their children's learning results at school (Beck & Vestre, 2008).

For parents whom home education is not an option, the reasons are school based, first among them the fear of absence of school community, and also including fear of bad learning results and social isolation. Time and economical possibility are less important.

Very few parents for whom home education is an option have mentioned reasons *against* giving home education at all. The highest

response here (14%) is for absence of the school community. There must then be other reasons for why these parents do not give home education at the present moment (table 2). Such other reasons could be ideological, positive school experiences and the possible social costs of giving home education.

The differences in answers in the survey for not having home education at the present moment, between parents for whom home education is an option and parents who exclude home education as an option, could indicate a threshold level for home education to become a real but not a realised option.

Table 2. *Parents reasons for not giving home education in 2006*

Reasons	When home education is not an option (%) ($n = 462$)	When home education is an option (%) ($n = 57$)
Learning results	78	2
Absence of school community	92	14
Have not enough time	41	4
Economical reasons	34	5
Afraid of social isolation	77	7
Other reasons	3	4

(Beck & Vestre, 2008)

The two studies are different because the 2002/03 survey asked for motives for real home education and the 2006 survey asked for motives for possible home education. Still, the significant differences in motivation for home education in these two surveys provide reasonable empirical ground to say that religiously motivated home education could be on a decreasing trend and socially motivated home education to be on an increasing trend in Norway.

Conclusion

When pupils have social problems at school and/or parents want more time with their child at home, the home education option becomes more present in the parents mind. A new socially motivated home education can be an attempt to reconstruct modern everyday life and seems to could recruit participants from all social classes.

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Christian W. Beck, Ass. Professor in Education. Institute of educational research, University of Oslo Norway. Research interests Sociology of education. Home education research since 1998. Dr. thesis: "Modern home education in Norway" (2006).

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