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Home Education and Social Integration

Summary

If school attendance is important for social integration, then a particular out of school practice like home education could possibly represent a threat to social integration. The findings of a Norwegian research project that surveyed socialization among Norwegian home educated students from different regions are presented and discussed using socialization theory and a theory of cultural order. Among the conclusions are the following: Pragmatically motivated home educated students are often socially well integrated. Religiously motivated home educated students that hold values distant from the values of society are not necessarily socially isolated. With more openness and more communication between society and home educators home educated students could meet criteria for social integration even more so than is presently the case.

1. Introduction

Socialization is the process whereby the helpless infant gradually becomes a self aware, knowledgeable person (Giddens 2006). Education can be seen as methodical socialization of the young generation (Durkheim 1956). Education must ensure a sufficient community of ideas and sentiments among the society'scitzens, without which any society is impossible (Ibid). According to Durkheim, solidarity and social integration are sufficient requirements for a community to exist. Social integration not only includes systems of integration, but also a reciprocity of practices and communication between either actors or collectives (Giddens 1988).

Home education is increasing in Norway and other modern countries (Beck 2006). If school attendance is considered to be important for social integration, non-attendance due to home education can be viewed as a threat to integration. Home education challenges how strongly parental rights as a fundamental human right should apply in democratic societies before they counteract the idea of public education and social integration. A too restrictive practice of such human rights could on the other hand counteract reciprocity between home educators and society and thereby increase the possibility of segregating home educators.

The social integration of home-educated students has become controversial, following a recent ruling of the European Human Rights Court (2006) in a case concerning home education in Germany. The ruling expresses concern about the development of parallel communities comprising distinct ethnic groups and immigrants in European countries. In order to avoid such social fragmentation, the Human Rights Court put the child's right to an education above parental rights. The state must guarantee the rights of children to an education which — according to the ruling — must also guarantee the child's right to social integration through participation in the school community. The ruling also asserts that parents' religious influence over their children must occur in such a manner that the children understand the consequences of their religious training. The ruling represents a shift from previous rulings in similar cases, in that the status of pa-

rental rights has been diminished. The conflict has become more pronounced in democratic societies between the need to integrate immigrants into mainstream society and the need to preserve the rights of individuals within the context of human rights.

The aim of this article is to provide further knowledge about home educated pupils and their socialization and integration in to society. The article is structured as follows:

1. A brief introduction to the international status of home education.
2. Analysis of the motives for home education as a possible cause for the poor social integration of home educated students.
3. A presentation of socialization theory and international research on socialization of home educated students.
4. Presentation of a survey of home educated students in Norway and a regional analysis of results concerning such students' socialization and social integration.
5. Further discussion based on Mary Douglas' theory about cultural codes and cultural purity.
6. Concluding remarks.

2. The international status of home education

Legal, social and educational frameworks that encourage home education vary among countries and within them. In Sweden and Estonia, for example, home education is treated as an exemption from compulsory schooling. In most American states, in the UK, Australia, and other English-speaking countries, and in the Nordic countries other than Sweden, home education is a way of providing compulsory basic education on par with school attendance. Other countries take some position between the two (Beck 2006, Glenn 2006, Leis 2005). Although home education is prohibited in Germany, some 500 families in Germany practice home education (Spiegler 2004b).

Students educated at home in effective learning environments appear to achieve the same scores as school attendees on tests of their knowledge (Baumann 2002, Welner and Welner 1999), although there are large groups of home-educated students over whom public authorities have limited oversight and control (Opplinger and Willard 2004). In addition, while registered home-educated appear to be well socialized into society, there is concern in several countries about the isolation of families who home-educate their children.

An estimated 40 percent of home-educators in Quebec, Canada, are not registered (Brabant, Bourdon, and Jutras 2004).

3. Motives for home education

There are various categories of home educators, and these categories are based on parents primary reasons for choosing home-based education. Some researchers have shown that differences in social integration may be the result of the various motivations for engaging in home education. Two early attempts at categorizing home educators 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 family values and conservative values, and are motivated by disagreement with schools with regard to values the schools promote and they are often loosely referred to as religious fundamentalists. Pedagogical home educators consider breaking with institutional schooling as key, along with pursuing alternative pedagogical approaches.

The intensity of the home educator's motivation can be a reflection of his or her feelings of conflict toward society-at-large. For some, home education is an act of conscience within

a secularized society and secularized schools. The US sociologist Mitchell Stevens (2001) distinguishes between heaven-based and earth-based motivations for home education. The heaven-based category expresses motivations that are mainly matters of principle, religion, and life perspective, as well as an adherence to ideological pedagogic approaches. According to Stevens, earth-based home educators are acting on situation-specific, pragmatic, and other specifically pedagogical issues. Thomas Spiegler (2004a) has concluded that the growth in home education in Germany is most pronounced among families acting according to so-called heaven-based motivation. Because of their religion or worldview, they tend to find themselves in conflict with schools more frequently than so-called earth-based home educators. Thus, they stand to gain more than earth-based home educators in withdrawing their children from school and home-educating them. Nevertheless, earth-based reasons for home education are also cited by the heaven-based category.

Social costs are associated with home education. Home educators may find themselves in conflict with their local communities, schools, and school authorities. Heaven-based home educators are better able to minimize such social costs than earth-based home educators, due to their faith and their fellowship with others who share their faith. Thus, home education based on religion may tend to make home educators more prone to stronger bonds within their particular subcultures.

In the United States, some 40 percent of home educators cite religious or moral convictions as their key motivating factors, although more than 90 percent of them also cite pedagogical reasons for home education (Bauman 2002:9-10). In Canada, motivations are largely pedagogical or related to other home- and family-values; a mere 14 percent of Canadian home educators cite religious reasons as decisive (Brabant, et al. 2003:117-119). In anoth-

er Canadian survey, 72 percent of respondents stated that they home educate for pedagogic reasons (Priesnitz 2002: 5). In the UK, the majority of home educators cite pedagogical reasons as being most important. Having educational freedom and flexibility, as well as being able to provide individualized education, are cited as being important by about two-thirds of UK home educators. Only 4 to 5 percent of UK home educators report that they home educate for religious reasons (Rothermel 2003: 79).

4. Home education, socialization and social integration

Some educators question whether home education has a greater impact than merely removing children from school, and actually isolates them from society-at-large. Similarly, many have expressed doubts as to whether home educated children are sufficiently socialized. Apple (2000) believes home educators in the United States isolate themselves into separate clans, which undermines both school and society.

Michael Apple views home educators as having played an important role in populist, neo-liberal, and neoconservative movements that have gained a great deal of influence in present-day United States. Apple perceives that home education families view themselves as stateless due to the secular humanism that now characterizes public schools. Also, they find themselves in a deep value conflict with the ideology of public school (Apple 2000). The great socio-cultural distance between secularized and post-modern values in schools and conservative religious values anchored in the family can engender more conflict than might seem necessary. For example, a dispute in Norway concerning dancing in schools ended up in the supreme court — the country's highest court — as a home education case (Straume 2004).

Social integration includes both a cultural, value-oriented aspect and an instrumental, social interest aspect (Hoëm 1978). Hoëm distinguishes between the specific and general parts of the socialization process, which may be first home, then school/society. Successful integration relies on a sufficient commonality of values and interest between specific and general social elements.

The conflicts that home educators are involved in are primarily conflicts of interest with the schools in which their children would otherwise be enrolled. The schools want to educate their children, but parents want to educate them themselves, at home. While such conflicts may be rooted in different values between home and school, this is generally not the case. If schools view the non-educational aspect of school participation as valuable and necessary, then delimited conflicts between home and school about who provides the childrens' education, could develop into more serious conflicts between home educators and school authorities.

Obviously, home educators and schools have, to a greater or lesser extent, a conflict of interest. However, that does not necessarily mean that their interests or values conflict with those of society-at-large. Self-sufficiency, focus on home life and equality, are key Norwegian values (Gullestad 1985). These same values constitute the values of home educators (Beck 2006). Different groups of home educators have varying degrees of consensus and conflict with the values and interests of the school, their local/regional community, the national community, and global society, regarding overarching social elements. Here, it is probably best to focus on conflicts with society-at-large, and to a lesser extent conflicts with schools.

A meta survey on how home educated students develop socially and emotionally has been conducted (Blok 2004). Blok asks whether the home educated children learn interaction with other children and adults, and if they develop character traits such as endurance and self confidence. He reviews eight studies, most of them qualitative, with between 20 and 24 participating students. He concludes that home-educated students appear to be just as well as or better adapted than school students. Blok concludes his review by pointing out that it is incorrect to claim that home educated students grow up in isolation from other children and youngsters.

Medin (2000) characterizes research on the socialization of home educated students as a young research discipline lacking a developed theory, with poorly developed research designs and measurement methods with poorly defined research questions, which often features self-selection of a small number of interview subjects. Nevertheless, Medin draws the following conclusions from the available research:

1. Home educated students participate in the daily life of the families and networks they are part of.
2. They are not isolated; rather they associate with and feel close to all sorts of people.
3. Parents encourage home educated students to maintain social contacts beyond the family.
4. They have solid self-esteem.
5. They appear to function well as members of the adult community.

A preliminary conclusion must be that organized and registered home education does not post particular problems to the socialization of the student.

5. Social integration of Norwegian home education – a regional analysis

A survey study of Norwegian home education, based on a questionnaire, had a net sample size = 128 (90 % of the gross sample), from all re-

Table 1 Degree of consensus or conflict in values and interests between home educators and school/national society

Home educator category	Consensus in interests with school	Consensus in values with school	Consensus in interests with national society	Consensus in values with national society
Structured home educators	Weak	Strong in areas other than primary beliefs	Strong	Strong
Unschooling	Weak	Weak	Medium	Medium
Pragmatic home educators	Medium	Strong	Strong	Strong
Unregistered home educators	Weak	?	Weak	?

gions of Norway. The population of Norwegian home educators is on research basis estimated to be between 196 and 1160, with 369 being the best estimate (Beck 2006). The difference: 369 – 128 = 241 (65 %) could be a tentative but clearly overestimated guess of numbers of unregistered home educated students in Norway.

The analysis of the Norwegian survey identified four main groups of home educators (Beck 2006):

1. *Structured home educators.* These are frequently religious, well-educated, middle-class parents who are role- and position-oriented (Bernstein 1977), and who provide traditional, curriculum focused education in the home.
2. *Unschoolers.* These are well-educated, middle class, anti-establishment, person- and identity-oriented parents who often have radical political and cultural viewpoints (ibid) and who provide child-centered home education with a low degree of structure and planned pedagogic.
3. *Pragmatic home educators.* These are typically rural, working-class parents with limited formal education, who emphasize home education anchored in practical work.

4. *Unregistered home educators. These include* Romanis; unregistered immigrants; socially troubled families some times with substance abuse problems; and some fundamentalist religious families. Some of unregistered home educators appear to use home education as part of a self-imposed isolation from society.

Based on Hoëm's theory, the four groups of Norwegian home educators, are categorized according to degree of consensus and conflict in values and interests with school and national society (table 1).

Where there is a limited consensus in values and interests between home and school, Hoëm (1978) believes that this discord will result in greater socio-cultural distance between specific and overarching social elements, and, hence, poorer socialization and more social segregation. Hoëm (1978) believes that a limited consensus in values and interests between home and school will result in greater socio-cultural distances between specific and overarching social elements, and, hence, poorer socialization and more social segregation.

Seen on the whole, unregistered home

Table 2 HE- social segregation, regional differences in Norway

Region	1) % of HE-students in the survey out of the estimated total number of HE-students	2) % of HE-students with religious motives in the survey	3) % of HE-students with a great deal of contact with other HE-students in the survey
Eastern Norway	40,3	43	65
Southern coastal Norway	18,2	30	45
Western Norway	114,3*	17	36
Central Norway	21,6	83	42
Northern Norway	17,0	0	29

* Exceeds 100 percent because the figure includes students who were home educated as a result of a rural school conflict originating before the 2001-2002 survey year.

educators generally are groups that in various ways are poorly integrated into the national community. A primary, articulated concern is that children from these groups may become isolated in socially deviant, religious fundamentalist home environments. In the worst cases, there is suspicion that such isolation covers up inadequate parenting or even child abuse. Only limited research and documentation is available to shed light on such suspicions.

Home educated (HE) students social segregation will in this analysis be split into three parts: 1) *Degree of HE social isolation from society,* 2) *HE value distance from society* and 3) D*egree of internal HE community* (3).

5.1 All regions
The three dimensions of social integration are measured as follows (table 2):

1) Degree of HE social isolation. HE students who completed the survey, can be characterized as being more visible and available and thereby less isolated than those who were

merely calculated (estimated). Thus, *the number of students participating in the survey, as a percentage of the total number of HE-students estimated in a region,* is used as measure of the degree of social isolation of home educated students in the region.

2) HE value distance to society. In spite of a national church (lutheran Christian) and regional differences, the Norwegian population is highly secularized, also parents with school-age children. *Percentage of home educated students, whose religious beliefs are the primary motivation for home education, in the survey,* is used as a measure of HE-value distance to society.

3) Degree of internal HE community. *Percentage of home educated students with a great deal of contact with other home educators, in the survey,* is used as measure of degree of internal HE-community.

Measured rang-correlation (Spearmans rho) gave R12 =.30, R13=.30 and R23=.70. Conclusions from this study are:

1. Religious motivated home education with large value distance to society, gives higher degree of internal HE-community. On the contrary pragmatically motivated home education is more often related to less value distance to society and to lower degree of internal HE-community.

2. High degree of social isolation of home educators is only weakly related both to a large value distance to society and to a high degree of internal HE-community.

Isolation of home educators from society could then be due to other causes than value distance to society and participation in HE communities.

5.2 Each region

In The *Western region*, pedagogical and pragmatic motivations dominate. The Western region is characterized by a high incidence of individuals having center to right-of-center political orientations and traditional, strong religious (Christian) backgrounds. In general, a high degree of common values exists between the region and home educators. Western Norway stands out as the region in which home educators are best socially integrated into society.

Home education in *Eastern Norway* appears to be driven by principles; there is an equal distribution between families motivated by religion and those motivated by pedagogical concerns. Here, religious groups are generally less powerful than along the country's western area, and politically HE-families tend to be more left wing. The value gap in the region is pronounced. In Eastern Norway, HE-students are less socially integrated into society than in the south coastal and western areas. In Eastern Norway, we see the contours of a new sub-culture in which home education is a significant unifying factor.

In *The Southern, coastal region of Norway*, fewer home educators than in Eastern Nor-

way state that religion and other beliefs are the reasons why they are home educating; rather, pedagogical reasons dominate. The gap in values between home educators and the rest of the region is minor, as is the case in Western Norway. Nevertheless, home-educated students from the southern, coastal region of Norway are less socially integrated into their society than their counterparts from Western Norway. No nascent home education subculture appears in Coastal Southern Norway.

In *Central Norway*, religious beliefs are the dominant motivational factors. There is a great gap in values between home educators and the rest of the region, where left-of-center political parties are strong. The children of home educators in Central Norway are relatively poorly socially integrated into society. Central Norway is vulnerable to conflicts associated with home education. Thus, it may not be accidental that two out of three home education court cases in Norway in the late 1990s were in central Norway.

Home educators in *Northern Norway* report that pragmatic issues are the main reason for choosing home education. For example, long traveling distance to schools is often a factor. In this region, there are few conflicts between home educators' values and the value set typical of the region, despite the fact that Northern Norway is where home educators are most socially isolated. Home education in Northern Norway occurs on an as needed basis; the Sami (Lappish) population is, as are other northerners, accustomed to arriving at independent solutions, given the long distance to governmental headquarters in Oslo. Harsh nature and scattered settlements invite autonomous, pragmatic solutions, and relations with schools are no exception. Home education in Northern Norway has roots dating back to the 1700s, when extensive home education was recorded in the region (Tveit 2004).

5. Conflicts in home education — a cultural anthropological explanation

Activities and functions that promote the spirit of a community are prominent features of schools. In Norway, as in other countries, public schools are perceived as key to the national community (Telhaug 1994: 130-131). Slagstad (2001: 388-394) emphasizes the role of public schooling in nation building. He establishes that the task of public school was to raise a nation and to provide public education. School's most important tasks were to level out societal differences and to implement social integration. The importance of public school to a national and cultural community, social justice, and national independence is emphasized. Breaking with school becomes a threat not just to school itself but to national identity.

Mary Douglas provides an analysis of the connection between cultural codes and what she calls cultural purity. In her classical work, *Purity and Danger*, she hypothesizes that what is impure in a community, is something that is out of its order and its cultural and societal rules. The purpose of a society is to protect what is pure. In this way, all societies feature some aspects that could be considered "dirty," something impure that needs to be dealt with (Douglas 2004). This can apply to the most profound and religious sensibilities. Generally Douglas' concepts purity and dirt involve morality. A society has norms for right and wrong. If an individual violates these, s/he becomes a criminal to be punished, or s/he is regarded and treated as a deviant. Such an understanding of purity also applies to daily life in the form of common rules for proper behavior (Wuthnow 1987: 84-92). Douglas points out how quickly changes in and of themselves may increase the threat to the established social and cultural order, as well as social unity. Further, Douglas presents a hypothesis on the inter-

connection between the drive toward cultural purity, cultural classification, and boundary setting. Applying Douglas' analysis is useful for understanding the high level of conflict associated with home education. The hypothesis is about the position of what is pure or impure/dirty. Douglas sets forth the claim that what is impure or dirty in society is not so in and of itself, but because of its position (Douglas 2004: 43-50.

To varying degrees, home educators may deviate from the educational content provided by public schools. Most home educators accept the importance of a shared foundation of knowledge in society and they largely support the fundamental values of it and the institutions of society beyond school. It is neither the content nor methods of home education that are perceived as threatening by public authorities, but the fact that home educators break with the public school system and conduct the students' education in the home, outside established schools.

To return to the notion that things that are out of place are threatening, home education becomes a threat to public school and to the national community. Home education in and of itself is not dangerous, but its placement — outside of school — is. Applying M. Douglas's terminology, home education is declared "dirty" to protect social unity and public schools against the threat that home education could represent. When the place where education is conducted is moved from the schoolroom to the home, it becomes important to both public authorities and home educators to maintain and defend their values and interests based on the choices made and to proceed according to the new situation that has arisen.

Home educators seek advice from experienced home educators, with whom they exchange advice and opinions regarding home education, public authorities, and other topics. Such communication strengthens home educa-

tion communities. Embarking on home education is a difficult choice for a family to make; for most people, the threshold to cross is very high. Once the choice is made, many people experience stigmatization in schools and, perhaps, by others in the community. Like-mindedness is an issue. Douglas's purity hypothesis may hold particular internal significance to home educators who begin home educating due to religious beliefs. These educators often break with public schooling because, in their view, it has become inadequately religious and over- secularized. That which is holy and pure in their lives is threatened. Thus, they seek to establish communities within their own religious environments and with other religious home educators. For some of the HE-families with religious motives, Mary Douglas's purity hypothesis is inverted. They may perceive school authorities and also other home educators as dirty and threatening to the purity of their own beliefs and their own home education.

In interactions between some home educators and school authorities, new social and cultural boundaries between "us" and "them" could be codified. Then, according to Douglas both home educators and authorities more often could characterize the other part as dirty and separate from their own environment, and they both prefer to stick with the "pure." The "outsiders" could become scapegoats for anything and everything that goes wrong. This pattern could maintain and reinforce conflicts associated with home education and could also be an independent reason for the inadequate social integration of families that home educate.

Nowadays, when compared with just a few years ago, public authorities seem to be more restrictive in allowing split solutions that provide some school attendance and some home education. Then, public authorities strengthen the boundaries between school participation and home education.

A national community under pressure may in and of itself be an independent factor that reinforces the conflict level between home education and public schooling, and may promote the fear that home education leads to social segregation.

6. Concluding remarks

Sustained, long-term home education can occurs due to parents' religious beliefs and practices, pedagogical preferences, and pragmatic needs for fulfilling children's compulsory, basic education outside of public or established private schools. Home education, particularly among parents who are religiously motivated, can challenge social unity. Nevertheless, among home educators who are registered and monitored, home-based education also appears to produce well-socialized students. The greatest difficulties with regard to social integration have to do with unregistered home educators. Such home educators often have little or no communication with society and there is no supervision of the quality of their practiced home education. Thus, there is a real possibility of socially segregating children and putting them at risk. Postmodern national society is overloaded with subjective identity-management tasks that are best handled at a local level (Bauman 1997). When a centralized public school emphasizes universal national, secularized, and objective values, home education environments may be constituted as subjective protests to such school-values. Some post-modern HE communities of shared religious values could be a threat to social integration. Still, home education could mostly be constructive and essential for maintaining social diversity and knowledge diversity, and for overall social integration in post-modern societies. Most home educators want an atmosphere of open-mindedness and open communication with society (Beck 2006). Such an atmosphere depends on Gid-

dens' concept: reciprocity of practices, on individual, local, and national levels. With such conditions, home education could be a part of a more pluralistic, but still integrating public education.

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