Stepping out of the System? A Grounded Theory on how Parents Consider Becoming Home or Alternative Educators

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Abstract

This qualitative thesis explores the decision-making processes of UK home and alternative educators. During all stages of the design, data gathering and analysis of findings, the study followed the principles of constructivist Grounded Theory. Twenty-one parents participated in semi-structured interviews. Some were current home and alternative educators, and others were undecided or had changed their minds about home educating.

The core process of the grounded theory constructed is entitled '**Stepping out of the System?**' The participants' journeys are presented with the aid of a metaphor: a landscape comprised of furrowed grooves of differing depths with space between where they may carve out their own path. The grooves represent educational settings, groups, or their family home. Some are well trodden and easy to access whereas others are difficult to enter or are in hard-to-reach locations. The core process of the theory is composed of three main categories depicting stages of the journey. Firstly, **attitudinal direction** relates to parents having opinions of school that developed before they began to consider how to educate their child. Attitudes are affect-laden and guide the process of information gathering. The **surveying the landscape** stage involves both formal research and informal methods such as hearing the views of others and acting on their own feelings. Social media and online sources are strong influences. The final stage, **negotiating obstacles**, involves finding practical solutions to barriers they may encounter. These include support from family members, work, and relocation. The strength of pre-existing attitudes seems to determine whether the parents overcome the obstacles faced. Finally, concepts from Reddy, Bourdieu and Gee are drawn upon to explore properties of the alternative spaces

that the participants found or created such as comfort, shared opinions, and unwritten rules.

This research contributes to knowledge by demonstrating that not all home and alternative educators have anti-school attitudes, and many wish to **tunnel between** different types of provision with the intention that their child will enter into 'the system' at some point in the future. Recommendations include encouraging policymakers to listen to the reasons for home and alternative educators not wishing to engage with their local schools and perhaps encouraging flexi-schooling for those who feel that full-time school is not best suited to their child.

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Between 2013-2018, the numbers of home educated children registered with their local authority (LA) doubled. The total reported by the 106 local authorities (out of 152) that responded to the Association of Directors of Children's Services survey was 40,359 (the estimate for all LAs being 57,873). As there is no compulsory registration process in England, many more children are not included in this number. Data on home educated children registered with their local authority showed the majority to be of upper primary or secondary school age (UK key stages 2, 3 and 4) (ADCS, 2018). Those parents that gave a reason cited dissatisfaction with the school, or concerns for their child's emotional health. Parents declaring that they were home educating while they waited for a place in their preferred school to avoid fines, or to prevent the child's exclusion from school were also identified in the 2018 ADCS report.

In response to this rapid increase in numbers, in April 2018, the Department for Education published 'Elective home education: call for evidence', a public consultation seeking evidence and suggestions relating to the registration and monitoring of home educated children. The opening point was that:

> *…the government intends to safeguard the primary duty of parents to lead their*
>
> *children's education, including home education. It does not intend that the state*
>
> *should supplant this parental role* (DfE, 2018:5).

The authors stated that they believed most parents are educating their children well, but acknowledged that new issues have arisen such as unregistered schools. They also raised concerns about radicalisation. One of the aims of the consultation was to ask how to better support parents (although they did not intend to offer any financial assistance).

Home education has repeatedly drawn the gaze of the British media with a predominantly negative discourse of risk dominated by incidents where children were mistreated, such as eleven-year-old Dylan Seabridge, (who died of scurvy in 2011) and the sexual abuse and torture of an unnamed nine-year-old girl from Wales (Lewis, 2018). After these events and others, local politicians called for changes to policies on home education, such as registration and medical checks (Lewis, 2018). In the case of Dylan Seabridge, a local education officer had visited the family after social services received a 'tip off' about the family (as a consequence of his mother's employment tribunal), however the visiting officer had no power to see the child (Pollock, 2016). According to research on Gypsy (Bhopal and Myers, 2016) and Muslim home educating families (Myers and Bhopal, 2018) risks associated with parents using home education as a cover for abuse are less likely to be perceived in white, middle-class families. For some of the families in these minority groups however, the risk for them was associated with sending their children to school. This will be explored further in when I the return to the literature in Chapter 6.

The home education charity, Education Otherwise's website and phone line receive inquiries from parents asking advice on how to deal with LA officers. At the time of writing, the website authors were reconsidering their advice subsequent to the 2019 revised guidelines for Local Authorities. Although the legal situation has not changed, the updated government guidelines provide clarification on how school attendance orders should be

issued if families fail to provide evidence that a suitable and efficient education is being provided at home. Denying LA officers entry to the home ensures families can maintain privacy and be free to educate how they see fit, away from surveillance.

The framing of school attendance as the norm and marginalisation of home education may originate from the wording of the 1996 Education Act itself. For example, the use of the term 'compulsory school age' throughout given that attending school is not compulsory.

> *The result is that some forms of education (those that equate living and learning rather than education and schooling) are effectively denied, whilst school practices are treated as universally relevant* (Pattison, 2018:44).

Helen Lees (2011) researched how parents in England found out that home education was a legal right. She categorised them as having 'genuine', 'superficial', 'negative' and 'excuse' discoveries of the possibility of home education, each type having prepared for educating their child in different ways. For example, those having 'genuine' reasons would most likely have spent time preparing and reading about how to educate their child and may have spoken to other parents either in person or online. She claimed that those who had chosen it for 'negative' or 'excuse' reasons were more likely to be the ones trying to cover up neglect or poor school attendance and that by determining the reasons for parental choice, local authorities could identify whether home education is being exploited. Lees (2011) calls entry into home education a 'gateless gate' because there is no discernible pattern, it is unregulated and depends on individual circumstances. There are clearly many different reasons for making the decision with some parents deliberating for longer than others. In Chapter 2, I present literature on the history, legalities, reasons for and types of home education.

More recently, not only is education in the home under scrutiny, but also in unregistered schools and study centres. The Channel 4 investigative programme 'Dispatches' broadcast on 4th February 2019 was hosted by Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield. The episode was based on the findings of her report 'Skipping School: Britain's Invisible Children' which particularly highlighted older children who were withdrawn from school for reasons such as having special educational or behavioural needs. The families it focussed on were new to home education and for them it was not their preferred choice. Another theme of the programme was illegal and unregistered schools operating in inappropriate buildings such as office blocks. The episode triggered numerous responses in the press from home education advocates such as *The Times Education Supplement* article entitled 'Project Fear on home education must end'. The author, a former home educator, believed the Children's Commissioner 'sought to persuade the general public that home education was a danger to children because parents cannot be trusted with their own children' (Hardy, 2019).

Aims and choice of methodology

My interest in home and alternative education originated from my involvement in a small-scale technology project at a part-time setting of home educated children. A few months into my doctoral studies, I decided I was going to use Grounded Theory as my methodology, but in a secondary school. Visits to potential schools for exploratory purposes, however, were not stimulating me. In one, I actually felt unwelcome and felt I did not want to spend the next couple of years as an outsider 'spying' on their practice. In contrast, I felt welcome in the alternative setting and I soon developed a real interest as to why the parents had chosen it for their children.

A feature of classic Grounded Theory is 'emergence', and this applies to not only the theory that develops, but also the research problem and questions (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). How exciting to enter a field without any preconceived hypothesis or expectations about what one might find. Once themes emerged, questions formed, and I then pursued participants who could help me to answer them.

I immediately felt very comfortable upon reading about Grounded Theory. I wanted to view my data with fresh eyes and delve deeper into interesting aspects as I encountered them. In its very nature, Grounded Theory allows for flexibility as questions are changed and new participants sought as findings emerge; it is very useful in a setting where there is minimal prior research. Goulding (2002) states that:

> *Usually researchers adopt grounded theory when the topic of interest has been*
> *relatively ignored in the literature or has been given only superficial attention*
> (2002:55).

Although there is now a substantial body of literature on home education, there have always been very specific research foci and questions that limited the involvement of the participants. I found Grounded Theory to be particularly beneficial in this study as it enabled me to gain understanding of the factors that influenced the participants when deciding whether or not to home educate.

An interesting, and sometimes controversial aspect of Grounded Theory that I will explore further in Chapter 3, is that one considers the literature as data. The researcher views the literature through the lens of the emerging theory, returning to it after the research findings have been analysed. No exhaustive literature review to force my thinking in a certain direction. No theories to constrain my research or analysis. An unplanned journey into

other academic fields. Was I, like my participants, **stepping out of the system?** Or was it simply a different system with rules and regulations of its own?

Why this research is useful

The 2009 'Report to the Secretary of State on the Review of Elective Home Education in England' was argued to be 'perhaps the most significant threat to EHE in England in its history, since the 1944 Butler Act legally enshrined it as an option' (Lees, 2011:31). Its author, Graham Badman, criticised research into home education. Non-home educating researchers, Morton (2011) and Fensham-Smith (2017) believe partisanship to be a feature of the field of home education research. Research to date on home education in the UK is limited and, because there is no national database of home educators, it is difficult to produce a representative sample for qualitative or quantitative analysis. Approaching families through support networks and forum gatekeepers (as with Fensham-Smith's 2017 doctoral research) often has quite a low response rate but approximately a quarter of the moderators of Facebook or Yahoo! Groups agreed to Fensham-Smith's (2017) request to distribute an online survey. In total, she managed to obtain 242 valid survey completions. Of the 5000 questionnaires that Rothermel (2003, 2004) sent out, 1000 were returned and she eventually used fewer than half of these for her analysis. This was the largest recent study in the UK that yielded findings not only on motives and types of home educator, but also demographic data and academic and academic assessments of primary aged children. In her 2011 thesis, Morton pointed out that the educational landscape in the UK had changed dramatically over the preceding ten years and that older home education literature and studies based in other countries may not be applicable to the current context. Because of the dearth of peer-reviewed studies into her area of interest, Lees (2011) cited

newspaper articles to demonstrate the media climate at the time of her research into the discovery of home education as a possibility. I too have drawn upon stories from the press to provide further evidence in this study.

Pattison (2018) asserts that alternatives to mainstream schools have often been positioned as 'other', 'problematic' and not normal. Her critical discourse analysis of documents such as the Education Act and newspaper articles highlighted this with phrases such as 'compulsory school age' causing many to assume school is obligatory. Examples of the presentation of home education in a negative light were phrases about parents having to ask permission or to think long and hard about the consequences; no equivalent advice was suggested to those considering schools. In the quotation below, Pattison offers an interesting viewpoint on the marginalisation of home educators.

> *For home educators, the position of imposed/self-sought exclusion is a gathering point for collective identity where the position of 'other' offers a place of belonging conferred by shared experiences and values and consolidated through a discourse of collectivity* (Pattison, 2018:52).

Most research to date on home education focusses on families who are already home educating. There is minimal literature regarding how parents go about making the decision to home educate beyond studies carried out in the USA (with mainly conservative Christian cohorts - see Van Galen, 1988). In Campbell's (2012) PhD research, convenience followed by snowball sampling meant that many of the families knew, and therefore, influenced each other, with 79% being members of same church group. She applied Langley's (1995) decision-making model to her data. However, this was a model designed for organisations; I

am of the view that decision-making where children are involved would have more emotional investment, and greater implications for the future.

> *Mainstream research in the Sociology of Education has neglected home education. Home education needs to be considered as part of sociological debate around educational choice, pedagogical constructions and education as an activity of motherhood* (Morton, 2011:289).

Although nine years have passed since Morton's quotation above, there remains scope to add to the literature on home and alternative education. The present study addresses the lack of research on decision-making and educational choice as it follows the journey of some of the participants who were unsure of which path to take, and some who changed their mind.

Additionally, many prior studies of home education were carried out before social media became so prevalent, which of course allows for enhanced communication between groups of parents. This study will contribute to new knowledge in the area through consideration of contemporary issues in a connected society where groups of like-minded people can form affinities and information can easily be found. Finally, there is an under-researched group of children attending full or part time alternative settings such as forest schools, learning communities, Montessori Schools, Steiner Schools and study centres. This thesis explores parental desires for an alternative to the mainstream.

Overarching problem

Spending almost a year working on another project in a part-time alternative educational setting exposed me to the daily lives and concerns of home and alternatively educating parents and children. It also enabled me to advertise for participants, some of whom

invited me into their homes. The adjacent nursery school had a noticeboard that gave me access to parents of younger children. This setting was the site of exploratory research and, as my previous specialism was in the area of educational technology, I initially expected my study to focus on technology's role in home education. Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest a 'grand tour question' as the starting point for Grounded Theory research for example, tell me about your situation (see Chapter 4 for examples of my interview questions).   The exploratory interviews soon revealed that technology was not a topic of concern for the participants, and I noticed that they spent more time talking about the decision-making process itself. Thus, the research problem and interview questions actually emerged after I had coded the first round of open-ended interviews. As themes appeared in the data, research questions developed that were more focussed and I pursued participants who could help me to answer them. This is termed theoretical sampling and I discuss this aspect of Grounded Theory in Chapters 3 and 4.

Research problem:

The research problem that I decided upon after speaking to home educating parents who made use of the part-time alternative setting is:

What is the process of becoming a home or alternative educator and which factors influence the decision?

Emergent research questions:

The research questions were chosen after my coding of the first round of interviews in order not to push the findings in a particular direction.

1. **What are parents' motivations for investigating the possibility of home/alternative education?**

2. **How and why do potential home/alternative educators gather information about alternatives to mainstream education?**

3. **What barriers do parents face in implementing their choice and how do they overcome them?**

Thesis structure

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the present chapter, I introduced the thesis and the background to the study. I also presented the overarching problem and described the emergent nature of the research questions. My choice of Grounded Theory as a methodology was briefly explained.

Chapter 2: An overview of the fields of home and alternative education

This chapter comprises of an initial literature review, predominantly carried out before the data collection began. It begins with the historical and legal position of home education and considers the reasons parents choose to home educate as well as alternatives such as flexi-schooling and non-mainstream provision. I identify a gap in the literature regarding the nature of the decision-making process. The purpose of this review was to gain theoretical sensitivity, and not to carry out such a comprehensive examination that I became drawn to use theoretical frameworks utilised by others. My aim was to enter the field without a hypothesis or lens through which to view the data. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Methodology-why Grounded Theory?

I present an overview of the different versions of Grounded Theory with justification of my choice to use constructivist Grounded Theory. Grounded theory methods have evolved over the past fifty years and faced criticism from many authors. In this chapter, I tackle some of the controversies associated with its use.

Chapter 4: Data collection and description of analysis

In this chapter, I describe the stages of Grounded Theory and how I applied them to my study. The recruitment of participants, ethical considerations, interview process and analysis are discussed. I provide examples from the data to illustrate coding and memoing as well as how I formed links between the emerging categories to construct my grounded theory.

Chapter 5: Findings and discussion

I introduce the core process of **stepping out of the system?** and present its three categories and nine subcategories. I use a small selection of quotes from the participants to show the spectrum of experiences. I go on to provide an explanation of patterns and relationships within the data to probe more deeply into the findings. I explore similarities with, and differences to, previous studies.

Chapter 6: Return to the literature through the lens of **stepping out of the system?**

This chapter comprises a focussed literature review carried out in parallel with the data analysis. The research findings guided the search for literature. Initially, I focus on the formation of attitudes, and how attitudes to schools, learning and parenting have changed

in recent history. Next, I present literature on how parents make school choices via formal and informal research and how the introduction of a neo-liberal marketplace in English education has dramatically changed this process. Finally, I discuss the role of emotions in decision-making and the types of sacrifices parents make in order to educate their children how they see fit.

Chapter 7: Building a conceptual framework

I present the grounded theory **Stepping out of the system**? using metaphor as a tool to help communicate the stages of the participants' journeys. I integrate the theory into a conceptual framework drawing upon ideas from Reddy, Bourdieu and Gee. These concepts enabled me to determine reasons that parents occupy and remain in certain positions on the educational landscape.

Chapter 8: Conclusions, reflection and limitations

In this chapter, I summarise the outcomes of the study and outline my theoretical and methodological contributions as well as limitations of the research. I give recommendations for further investigation.

Introduction

In this chapter, I present a brief summary of literature about home and alternative education, including historical and legal perspectives. The purpose is to gain an awareness of the local and international context to provide sensitivity, but not to guide the study in any way. I carried out the majority of the writing before gathering the data in order to comply with university requirements; however, I did not decide on a theoretical framework prior to collecting the data as per the guidelines of Grounded Theory. Once alternative solutions and flexi-schooling arose as themes in the data, I decided to undertake a further literature search in order to sensitise myself to those contexts.

Iderees et al. (2011) succinctly summarise the stages of literature review in Grounded Theory research:

> At an initial stage, the literature provided a context for the research and pointed towards potential areas of focus, thus reducing the uncertainty that characterises this stage. At the emergence and ambiguity resolution stages, it allowed theoretical sensitisation of research findings and of the conceptual framework. At the maturity stage, it was used intensively to help refine relationships between categories and place the emerged theoretical framework in the context of other work, thus allowing its consolidation. In this context, the role of the literature is that of theoretical sensitisation at the beginning of Grounded Theory, but not to the extent that it leads to the formation of preconceived concepts and categories (Iderees et al., 2011:199).

The legalities of home and alternative education

Educating children in the home is not a recent phenomenon. In fact, compulsory schooling has only been the popular choice since it became free of charge in 1891. Before that time, should they wish to send their children to school, parents not only had to pay school fees, but they also lost any potential earnings the child could provide, it is likely that because of these reasons, fines for non-attendance were extremely common in the first year. In a similar pattern to more recent times, families with a higher income would send their children to a private school rather than utilising state provided schools, or they might hire a governess or tutor to provide education in their home (Webb, 2011). The Newcastle Report of 1861 anticipated objections to compulsory schooling for religious and political reasons much like those expressed by home educators today and questioned whether a universal compulsory system could be achieved or was even required (Newcastle report, 1861 cited in Webb, 2011).

The current 1996 Education Act for England states that:

> *The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient fulltime education suitable (a) to his age, ability, and aptitude, and (b) to any special educational needs he may have, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise* (1996 Education Act: Section 7).

This stipulation has remained unchanged since the 1944 Education Act and home education has always been permissible. The UK is one of the few countries in Europe where home education is largely unregulated and local authorities (LAs) are only officially aware of those families who have notified them or that have given this as a reason to a head teacher for deregistration from school (Webb, 2011). There is no requirement to register with the LA if

the children have never attended or applied to attend a school, although some LAs maintain voluntary registration schemes (DfE, 2019a). In 2019, the Department for Education issued updated guidelines regarding parents informing schools of the reasons for a child's removal. This was after concerns were raised that children were simply disappearing from registers. In England and Wales, informing the school is still not a legal requirement unless the child is in a special school and then permission must be requested. Children that remain on register but are not attending will be regarded as truanting so an attendance officer will be notified (DfE, 2019a). If the school receives a letter from a parent informing them that the chid is being home educated, this information is passed to the LA.

> *If your child is currently on the roll of a school you are not obliged to inform the school that he or she is being withdrawn for home education or gain consent for this. However, it is sensible to do so, in order to avoid subsequent misunderstandings as to how you intend to fulfil your parental responsibility for your child's education. The school is obliged to inform the local authority of children removed from its admission register and will give home education as the reason, if notified of this by the parent. Parents of children withdrawn from school for home education are not legally obliged to inform the local authority themselves - but again it is sensible to do so, either directly or using any local registration scheme which exists, to facilitate access to advice and support* (DfE, 2019a:13).

In Scotland, permission from the local authority must be granted before removing a child from school registers (The Scottish Government, 2007). Although it is not compulsory to provide evidence of the child's learning, non-response to requests will eventually trigger interventions. If there are serious concerns that a child is not being suitably educated a

school attendance order can be issued and non-compliance will lead to a magistrate's court hearing and potentially prosecution and/or a parenting order (DfE, 2019a, The Scottish Government, 2007). Of course, the opinions of LA inspectors are subjective, and one individual's perceptions of 'efficient' educational provision may not be of the same standard as another. According to the most recent guidelines issued by the Department for Education:

> *There is no definition of this in statute law. However, it can be interpreted as meaning education which 'achieves what it is intended to achieve'. This is not the same as the education being 'suitable' - because it is possible to deliver efficiently an education which is definitely not suitable for the child. Conversely, it is possible to deliver a suitable education very inefficiently* (DfE, 2019:7).

The guidelines regarding children with special educational needs are more stringent, in that across the British Isles, permission from the LA must be sought before removing a child from a special school and any EHC that is in place must still be reviewed annually. Financial assistance may be available to assist parents with their children's needs however, as with much of the guidance; the LA does not have a duty to provide this (DfE, 2019).

The support given by English LAs to home educators varies hugely, from providing curriculum materials and access to specialist services, to nothing at all. This was an issue raised by the Badman Review in 2009, in which the author concluded that this variation in provision was unacceptable. Recommendations put forward included establishing a national register and enforcing visits to home educators within the first month of registration (Badman, 2009). A change in government in 2010 meant that the process of implementing the changes to policy never occurred (Webb, 2011). The 2018 Call for

Evidence raised similar concerns and additional ones regarding illegal schools where children could be subject to a limited curriculum for example purely religious instruction (DfE, 2018). In response, the government issued new guidelines but made no change to the law, and LA support and provision of resources is still 'discretionary'. Advice to parents was that they should ask about safeguarding and staff checks before using part time provision and that unregistered independent schools should be made known to Ofsted (DfE, 2019a).

The Department for Education 2019 guidelines document seemed to clarify the meanings of the terms 'suitable' and 'efficient' with regard to the education being provided. Examples of unsuitable provision such as children not being in isolation or in a noisy environment are given, and particular reference is made to provision not conflicting with guidance on Fundamental British Values (although there is no obligation to teach these).

Northern Ireland's Education Authority guidelines for elective home education use the same legal terminology as the English/Welsh ones and the processes that may lead to prosecution for not providing a suitable or efficient education are also equivalent. The advice to parents however, seems to be framed in a supportive manner that acknowledges the child's point of view, the variety of approaches that may be taken, and the cost involved. Interestingly, the guidelines offer advice on how to find other home educating groups to ask questions of or to make social connections. They also advise on how to broach the topic with friends and family who may be sceptical. For parents who are considering removing their child from school, information on how to continue being supported (in the case of SEN children) or how to resolve issues with school are provided including the address of the Ombudsman (EANI,2019). This differs from the England guidance for parents, which is simply to talk to the teacher concerned. Although no financial assistance is offered, the Education Authority

Northern Ireland (EANI) guidelines provide information about entering children for exams and training courses for parents with SEN children. Annual contact is made to home educating families to provide updates and offer support, but each regional education authority has a different specific policy (EANI, 2019). This aspect of local authority contact differs in Scotland where the recommended (but not compulsory) annual letter's primary purpose 'should be for the authority to satisfy themselves that suitable and efficient education is being provided' (The Scottish Government, 2007:14). Another aspect of the Scottish Guidelines that differs is that parents must ask permission to withdraw their child from school and that the local authority should consult the child's record to see if any causes for concern are present for example referral to social services or child protection orders being in place.

The law in Wales is the same as that in England and Northern Ireland. As recognised in the 2009 Badman report, like in England, LA support in Wales is variable. The guidance document for parents seems to acknowledge this by stating that LAs do not receive funding for supporting home educating families but many like to 'get to know parents and, in some cases may provide support' (Welsh Government 2018:3).

It is difficult to gauge how successful home educators are in facilitating the learning process and how their children fare as adults as very few studies have followed children post-16, and very little is known about their eventual destinations. Rothermel (2004) studied PIPs (Performance Indicators in Primary Schools) tests in reception aged home educated children and found they out-performed school attendees regardless of socio-economic background. Nelson (2013) chose to interview home educated children and adults in her doctoral study as their voice is often missing from the debate. Upon entering educational institutions for

the first time some mentioned difficulties such as not being used to exam technique or wanting to answer every question straight away as in one-to-one tuition. The older interviewees were more likely to mention having missed out on socialisation due to not going to school events and finding it harder to make close friends.

International comparisons

Home education regulations vary significantly across Europe. For example, in Austria, the children must follow the national curriculum and be tested on it yearly (Petrie, 1995). Home education is very difficult to undertake in France, especially for non-French speakers, as it must closely match the provision in mainstream schools. Inspections take place and fines, or imprisonments are the punishment for not complying with the specified curriculum. The children must demonstrate average or above average attainment, but inspector requirements are quite variable (Petrie, 2001). Registration with a local school is compulsory in Norway and Portugal. According to Beck (2001) there have always been a very small number of home educating families (or part–time school attendees) in Norway due to its sparely distributed population in some areas. However, there have been recent increases in home educating families in urban areas. Norway had an estimated ten-fold rise in home education between 1996 and 2001. This is reported to be due to factors such as school entrance age being lowered from seven to six years, inclusion of new religious subjects, concerns about safety, closure of rural schools and interestingly, that parents began home educating for "pedagogical reasons, believing in more 'natural' learning" (Beck, 2001:357).

There are countries in Europe where home education is illegal except under very special circumstances. For example, Germany, Spain, Greece and The Netherlands. Germany's ban

on home education is due to social reasons because the government wish to promote tolerance and avoid the formation of parallel societies (Donnelly, 2007). The Romeike family applied for asylum in the USA as they faced prosecution for home educating in Germany. The USA immigration Judge Lawrence O. Burman stated:

> *I find that [the Romeikes] belong to a particular social group of homeschoolers who, for some reason, the [German] government chooses to treat as a rebel organization, a parallel society, for reasons of its own. As I stated above, this is not traditional German doctrine, this is Nazi doctrine, and it is, in this Court's mind, utterly repellant to everything that we believe in as Americans. … [I]f Germany is not willing to let them follow their religion, not willing to let them raise their children, then the United States should serve as a place of refuge for the applicants (*Burman, 2010 cited in Donnelly, 2016).

The USA regulates home education differently in each state. For example, officials in the state of Indiana require that instruction in the home be equivalent to that given in public schools with no other specified rules yet Pennsylvania education officials demand 'student work, standardized testing and [a] written report from an outside evaluator' (Kunzman, 2009:320). Home education in the USA has become so popular recently that in North Carolina there are now more children being home educated than those being schooled privately (Wood, 2014). Numbers nationally have apparently increased from 850,000 in 1999 to 1,690,000 in 2016, which represents 3.3% of school-aged children (although, as in the UK, accurate numbers are impossible to gain) (NCES, 2019). 91% of the parents surveyed by The US Department of Education in the USA who chose to home school did so because of

concerns regarding the school environment such as safety, drugs and negative peer pressure (US Department of Education, 2012, cited in Wood, 2014).

Alternative settings

As I carried out the exploratory interviews with parents who were utilising one or more alternative providers, I explored the legal status and popularity of these in England. The larger study also included parents that considered or used alternative educational provision. I go on to introduce the background behind free schools, as this is relevant to the story of one of the participants.

Alternative education is a broad term encompassing many types of full and part-time setting. Because of its fragmented and often unregulated nature, it is impossible to determine the numbers of children attending alternative educational establishments (Sliwka, 2008). In the UK, the term AP is predominantly used to refer to special schools and pupil referral units for those whose needs are not met by mainstream schooling. These are not part of the current study (except in the case of the final participant, who had to fight for her sons to attend a special school). In the United States, alternative education/school has different meanings from one state to the next but, as with AP in the UK, tends to be for children who are following adjusted programmes because they have not been successful in a conventional school; another phrase used is 'second chance school' (Mills and McGregor, 2017). Hope (2015) considers the term 'alternative' to be confusing in itself as:

> There are many children educated in 'alternative' or 'progressive' schools, such as Steiner, Montessori or democratic ones, most of which operate outside the state education system. These are poles apart from the 'alternative provision' which is

offered to children and young people who, for a plethora of reasons, cannot access or

cannot fit within conventional schools (Hope, 2015:109-110).

In this study, I apply the term alternative setting to private and state-registered schools that follow an alternative pedagogical approach such as forest, democratic, Steiner and Montessori schools. For an article that delineates the differences between these types of settings, see Mills and McGregor, 2017. They employ the term developmental and holistic educational alternatives but place democratic schooling in a category of its own.   Lees makes use of the terms mainstream and alternative education modalities (AEM) in her 2011 thesis, AEM encompassing elective home education (EHE) and democratic schooling modalities.

In England, government funding is not available for non-state provided alternative education unless it is classified as childcare (pre-compulsory school age or after school/holiday provision). Some parents are willing to pay in order for their child to attend a part-time setting in addition to home educating. It is difficult to determine whether a tuition centre or alternative provider is actually an unregistered school, but the guidelines are that it must be for fewer than 18 hours a week and have no more than five children attending at any one time. There are different rules for looked after children (DfE, 2019c).

Issues raised in the Children's Commissioner Report (2019) included the fact that there has been a recent increase in unregistered schools with unqualified teachers. An extreme cause of concern was that tuition centres were identified that had large numbers of children in small Portacabins with only religious books available. Ofsted has no authority to seize documents or registers, and without these, it is difficult to prove that children are attending for more than 18 hours a week. Part-time centres aimed at older primary or secondary aged

children (7-18) tend to avoid using the word 'school'. Study or tuition centres are becoming more commonplace, even amongst rows of shops in some towns (I mention this here purely because it is relevant to the story of one of my participants who assisted at one such tuition centre). Parental fees fund privately run centres in a similar way to traditional private schools. Although private schools do not have to follow the National Curriculum, I do not include them under the term 'alternative provision' as a large percentage of children attend (6.5% of UK children according to the Independent Schools Council Website).

Local authorities do not usually list alternative provision amongst their information for parents who are applying for schools. As stated earlier, some even mislead parents by their use of the term 'compulsory school age' despite the fact it is not a legal requirement to attend school. According to Lees (2011), the home educating participants in her study believe:

> *…the state is afraid of the lack of conformism that AEM (alternative education modalities) celebrates because it is against capitalist compliance and efficient production of economic goods* (Lees, 2011:278).

The establishment of free schools in England in 2011 as an extension of the Academies programme led to the possibility that groups of parents or teachers could make real their vision of a school outside of state control. The state funded Steiner school mentioned in the data was an example of a recently established free school. Being autonomous meant that these schools could experiment with innovative, non-mainstream approaches. The standard number of school hours and days was also modifiable as was teacher pay and even the need to be qualified. The first two rounds of applications to set up free schools showed proposer themes such as being smaller, caring and nurturing, having extended provision and outdoor

learning. Some, proposed as faith schools, could select 50% of their intake by religion. The successful applications tended to have an academic focus rather than having alternative approaches. Only a small number of free schools gained approval and more recently these tend to be part of a larger institution such as a learning trust (Higham, 2014).

In 2016, there were 384 free schools and Wiborg et al. (2018) found that most eventually became just like other schools as they had the same Ofsted inspections, examinations etc. The majority were not innovating pedagogically but were marketing themselves as different from their competition for example, by having a traditional uniform and strict discipline policy. The ones that did offer a different experience were founded on specific educational principles such as those of Steiner and Montessori.

Flexi-schooling

Because this thesis covers the variety of options available to UK parents, I will introduce the concept of flexi-schooling. Flexi-schooling is the term given for when a child attends school part-time and is home educated for the rest of the week. The school is not obliged to authorise a proposal to flexi-school but according to the Department of Education advice, it is permissible, and the child should be marked on the register as an authorised absence (DfE 2019a). The school receives full funding and is responsible for tracking the child's progress and ensuring that there are no safeguarding concerns.

Head teachers' responses to flexi-schooling requests vary dramatically. For example, according to an article in *The Guardian*, a father who took his son on wilderness-based activities after his flexi-schooling arrangement had expired was issued with a £60 fine. At the other end of the spectrum is a school in Staffordshire where 50% of the cohort are flexi-

schooled (Luckhurst, 2014). The Hollinsclough Church of England Primary was on the brink of closure with just five pupils when the head decided to offer flexi-schooling. Ofsted has since praised the school and it is now a hub for the rural community it serves (Ofsted, 2013). Children have the option of attending for the full five days or from Tuesday-Thursday only. The Head of the school was aware that flexi-schooling did not suit all teachers as some wished to maintain control of the children's learning. The establishment of a federation for flexi-schooling is enabling parents to research schools that encourage its practice. Rather than existing in isolated pockets, the formation of a network of schools is facilitating the sharing of good practice amongst teaching staff and leadership. However, tensions with the Department for Education are still present as flexi-schooling does not fit into standard schooling models and the children must still be registered as absent when out of school (Poultney and Anderson, 2019).

> *Barriers have prevented an engagement with the system and now, where a school has reintegrated them into a system, they become outliers for a different reason* (Poultney and Anderson, 2019:5).

The above-mentioned school has formed partnerships with parents who may otherwise have chosen to fully home educate. Operating as a learning community has been a very positive experience. The head teacher recognises that the parents are very sensitive to the needs of their children and often one or both parents have adjusted their work schedule to accommodate flexi-schooling. The school is now part of a multi-academy trust and has the option of moving to a larger site but the staff believe that the small size of the school is well suited to the children who attend (Poultney and Anderson, 2019). Twenty years ago, after her extensive study of UK home educators, Rothermel (2000) made recommendations for

open learning centres where home educating parents could access resources and children could engage with activities. This solution could be particularly valuable in rural areas or for parents who cannot afford materials.

The role of the state in family life

This section is only a small part of a wider discussion that questions the role of state-mandated education, I have included it because some home educators believe that the state should not be responsible for how or what their children learn. Traditionally, a community teaches its offspring the knowledge needed to survive and perform a role in society. Industrialised communities have amassed such a large amount of knowledge that it would be impractical for one person to try to transmit it all, so it is stored and passed on to those who need it via education. Before schooling, this would be as a master and apprentice or from a parent to a child. In what Dewey (1916) referred to as 'savage' groups, learning is informal and is concerned with passing on day-to-day skills and cultural norms.

Parents interviewed in Kraftl's (2013a) study of London home educators who attended a network expressed some anti-school opinions. Often these were due to negative experiences their child had at school before the parents decided to withdraw them. The emotional response to their child's discomfort was clear. They were not necessarily anti-state but had 'challenged the role of the state in taking ultimate responsibility for their children' (2013a:448). Parental rights is a very interesting debate that ultimately must include the rights of the child. Those opposing unregulated home education express concerns that children will not mix with peers from different backgrounds or those with different beliefs. Of course, segregated schools are very much the norm in some parts of the world including the UK. In Northern Ireland, for example, (where one of my participants

grew up and sent her children to primary school), there are very few schools not affiliated to either a Catholic or a Protestant denomination. Many of these also segregate children by gender. Even the teacher training institutions have a religious orientation (J. H. Nelson, 2013). The argument from Marples (2014) below echoes the reasons Germany introduced a ban on home education after Hitler came to power. The underlying concerns are that children would have alternative values instilled in them.

> *The potential threat to the well-being of individual children and to the welfare of the wider society resulting from the existence of fee-paying schools, faith schools and withdrawing children from mainstream education are such as to provide serious reservations concerning their acceptability in a liberal democracy. While there are extreme circumstances which make it incumbent upon a parent to withdraw her child from school, there is no general parental right to do so; there is certainly no right to prevent a child from learning something that is in her long term interests and to which she herself has a right* (Marples, 2014:37).

Conroy (2010) is of the opinion that the children not attending school are beyond the surveillance of the state and are therefore not under its control. This viewpoint suggests that the government should intervene in certain circumstances, for example, ensuring that boys and girls receive equal opportunities. Differential treatment by gender may occur if certain religious ideologies are enforced and some issues, such as LGBT rights may not be taught at all. In an article for The *Daily Mail* newspaper, Levy (2020) quoted Ofsted Chief inspector, Amanda Spielman who stated:

> *How can we make sure everybody's prepared for adult life if we let schools narrow what they do? Problems exist at a small minority of schools but the point is because*

of our sensitivities about religion, culture, ethnicity, we're very reluctant to say we've

got some really tough issues (2020:no page no.).

The above concerns are about certain schools withholding knowledge and opportunities.

Similar concerns but about elective home education are reflected in the recently issued

guidelines for parents (DfE, 2019a), clearer definitions of 'suitable' and 'efficient' education

are provided in that, although links to the national curriculum are not necessary, the level of

education must be of an:

> *…appropriate minimum standard which is aimed at, and the education should aim at*
>
> *enabling the child, when grown-up, to function as an independent citizen in the UK -*
>
> *and furthermore, beyond the community in which he or she was brought up, if that is*
>
> *the choice made in later life by the child (DfE, 2019a:7).*

This quotation highlights the concern that children's life chances may be limited if they are

not offered the opportunity to experience not only a certain level of education but also

meet other types of people. The concern of some home educating parents however is that

the curriculum itself is limiting. 'A school teaches the same curriculum day after day,

regardless of the families whose children they enrol' (Rothermel, 2012:54).

Because home education is unregulated in the UK, it has flourished unhindered, and many

methods and philosophies have developed. This variation is worrying for policy makers as

laid out in the Badman review of elective home education (Badman, 2009). A concern

raised by the 2018 Call for evidence (DfE, 2018) was the rights of the child in that, although

the standard of education in the home may be very good, it might not be what the child

wants, and the child may not have had any way to express his or her opinion. LA inspectors

are not authorised to speak to the child unless they suspect they are at risk of harm.

Although their study was of unschoolers' blogs in Australia and New Zealand, O'Hare and Coyne (2019) noted that '*Discourses of home education centrifugally pull away from the school system to varying degrees, exploiting and opening tensions within the authoritative discourse*' (2019:485).

Because of its private nature, home education seems to cause anxiety for those in power and there is a distrust that parents can educate their children properly. Interestingly, some parents feel children are safer being educated at home, as they consider schools as dangerous places (e.g. Myers & Bhopal, 2018). This opinion is particularly prevalent in the USA, where groups of home educators have solidified their anti-school stance and formed large networks. Arguably, the dangers there are more shocking and newsworthy than those in other countries as Apple states:

> *They are dangerous bodily; that is, they are seen as filled with physical dangers to the very life of one's children. The spate of shootings in schools in the United States has had a major impact on the feelings of insecurity that parents have about their children* (Apple, 2000:70).

Conversely, the British government is seemingly concerned about the dangers of children being away from their gaze. Tragic cases such as those mentioned in Chapter 1 and preceding those, the death of seven-year-old Kyra Ishaq who died of malnourishment in May 2008 after being withdrawn from school the previous December, have emphasised that children's mistreatment can be more easily identifiable in schools. Counter arguments to this are that social services are often aware of these children yet still miss important signs. In Kyra's case, the head teacher had contacted social services and both home education advisors and social workers had visited the house (Radford, 2010 cited in Lees, 2011).

Most home educators would not have a classroom established in their home but instead, utilise all manner of methods and pedagogies, which I introduce in the following section. Difference though, can be difficult for policy makers to deal with (Lees, 2011) and the Badman (2009) review recommendations (had they been implemented) would have suppressed any attempt by families to be completely autonomous. It is this freedom from constraints that appeals to many parents. Pattison (2015) explores the idea of home education being a heterotopia:

> *…by which new ideas can be explored through old ones and the weight of the dominant discourse can perhaps be sufficiently lightened to glimpse the possibilities which a different taxonomy of education would allow* (2015: 635).

My interpretation of her quote above implies that the only way to change the current system is to allow unrestricted exploration of alternatives. The opinions presented here are polarised and this seems to be unresolvable in the UK. Ex-home educator and teacher, Kelly recommended in her 2008 thesis that a spirit of co-operation with local schools would benefit Hawaiian home schooled children and that the state still has an important role to play. She suggested ideas such as joint policymaking and access to some school activities. These solutions might help encourage integration and resolve the animosity between some home education groups and their LA.

What does modern home education look like?

Home education is not an easy term to define, as the home is not always its primary location. As will be shown in the current study, home educators may make use of alternative settings for part or the week. Morton (2011) also noted the use of private tutors

and small part-time schools in addition to parental instruction, but her general definition of home education is clear and succinct:

> *…the education of children carried out primarily by parents within and around the home, in place of school-based education* (2011:25).

Many home educating parents start with a formal approach, with the intention of replicating a school environment at home. However, they soon abandon this as opportunities for learning outside the home and in an informal way are realised (Thomas, 1998, Kraftl, 2013a, Nelson, 2013). Participants in Thomas' (1998) study of 100 families from the UK and Australia, felt that the child had been learning naturally in their first five years and wished to continue with that approach. Many parents use a combination of approaches and Nelson (2013) categorised this group as semi-structured. She believes long-standing home educators may be more likely to use less structured approaches as they have more confidence in their ability and access to resources and networks. Rothermel (2012) noted the transition from informal to more structured approaches in the families whose children had never been to school; however, the converse pattern was seen in parents who had withdrawn their children from school.

The term autonomous education has a different meaning to home educators than to practitioners. In articles about school learning, autonomy is not 'teacher-less' or unstructured. It is the goal of many teachers that the pupils become independent, but not that they simply learn alone. To be reflective and self-motivated, but then bring what they learn back to the group and gain confidence and feedback (Masouleh and Jooneghani, 2012). Erickson and Wharton-McDonald (2019) make recommendations for encouraging autonomy in early years literacy. They are concerned that policy makers do not see the

importance of children having a love of reading. Gaining autonomy occurs in schools by allowing children to make choices, collaborate and have some control (whilst being supported), fulfils some of their psychological needs.

Instead of autonomous learning, Thomas and Pattison (2013) used the term 'informal home education' in their paper and state examples from around one hundred UK and Australian families. They observed children learning from their parents, formulating problems, and solving them by experimentation and reflection. They believe it to be impossible to prove that a child is learning and that their 'research challenges the view of learning as a separate, definable, deliberate activity and suggests that learning itself needs to be problematized in a very radical manner' (2013:152).

Many of the parents in both Lees' (2011) and Fensham-Smith's (2017) UK studies favoured an autonomous approach when educating their children. Advocates of autonomous education believe that children develop naturally by a process of trial and error and artificially forcing knowledge upon them does not speed up their development. It can in fact be harmful as those children who learn in a different way or are not ready for such difficult work, experience failure on a daily basis (J. Fortune-Wood, 2000). Autonomous education is most unsettling for those tasked with inspecting home educators (Lees, 2011). The 2009 Badman review recommended that the parents give an outline of their plans for the next twelve months. Autonomous educators would be unable to do this as the daily activities depend on what the child is interested in doing. They believe forcing and restriction affect a child greatly. 'Coercion damages thinking and particularly robs children of their own intrinsic motivations' (J. Fortune-Wood, 2000:71). A problem identified with child-led learning is that they may solely focus on one topic to the exclusion of others as

with Nelson's (2013) participant, Sophie who was committed to writing a thousand words a day on her medieval fantasy novel. Others seemed to be able to integrate multiple subjects into one activity, for example, a gaming enthusiast who learnt about careers and even ancient Greek through the medium of video games. The final, possibly expected problem arises when the parent is enthusiastic about some subjects but not others. For Nelson (2013) there was only one example of this, where the father wished to do science but the son would have preferred creative subjects (he eventually managed to study music). Jones (2013), whose small-scale Grounded Theory study used photovoice with teenagers, identified the relationship with parents who are also teachers. She reminds us that whilst parents can be encouraging and supportive, they are also in a position to yield control and power.

Nelson's (2013) interviews with young people highlighted exam entry as an area in which children felt unfairly discriminated against with many having to travel long distances to exam centres. 66% of Nelson's cohort of 15 young people aged 16-17 had taken some GCSEs but of these, the majority had only taken a small number (six taking four or fewer). The reasons given for this was the cost of exam entry and difficulty in finding centres. There was also a perception from the young people that only four GCSEs were required for entry to most college courses. One of the participants in the study had no qualifications at all and was employed as an au pair with the hope of becoming a chef in the future (Nelson, 2013).

There exists a broad spectrum of approaches to home education with unschooling being at one extreme. Children who are unschooled are allowed to play without force, rewards or punishments as these are sometimes perceived as emotional manipulation. They make their own decisions and mistakes (Grey and Riley, 2013). Very little research has been

carried out with unschooling parents, but a discourse analysis of Australian and New Zealand blog posts revealed opinions about the school system being authoritarian and controlling children (O'Hare and Coyne, 2019). It should be noted that the first author of the paper was an unschooling mother herself.

Fensham-Smith (2017) answered Badman's (2009) call for unbiased larger-scale research with her doctoral study. She still found that gatekeepers prevented access to some groups of people although she did manage to gain qualitative and quantitative data from a broad range of parents and children. Fensham-Smith (2017) questioned whether home educators that believe it does not need regulating are unaware of parents doing it in different ways to themselves. This may in part be due to online forums acting like echo chambers, so parents are only aware of those with similar viewpoints. Moderators had the power to silence parents who did not conform to the group's rules and opinions. For example, one parent in Fensham-Smith's (2017) study was criticised for saying positive comments about local authorities and special educational needs.

According to Stevens (2001), the normalisation of home education in the USA has been made possible due to a variety of conditions that may not be applicable to other contexts. However, individuals and groups from other nations may be able to follow examples from the USA to ease their transition. The USA has a decentralised education system where regulations differ from state to state (so grassroots organisations were able to gain legitimacy in less strict states first). Historically there have been large numbers of Conservative Christians who were financially able to home educate and finally, since the 1980s, there has been a move toward educational approaches that were based on the individuality of the child. Once the members of home education families grew to the extent

that they were a visible presence in public settings, other parents could see that they were

not that different to them and stereotypes such as them being 'weird' or 'hippies' were

broken down (Stevens, 2001).

Reasons for home educating

There are numerous reasons stated for parents' decisions to home educate without the

child ever having tried school. For example, Mountney's (2009) study found that parents

believed formal education should not start too early, did not want such large numbers of

children per adult, were dissatisfied with the curriculum on offer and felt school did not suit

their child's learning needs. Those who withdrew their child from school tended to state

that the child was failing to achieve, unhappy, withdrawn, or being bullied (Mountney,

2009).

The top five descriptions of what home education meant to them stated in Rothermel's

(2003) large-scale UK study were:

Parents' descriptions of what home education meant to them (n=390). Participants could give more than one answer	% of responses
Freedom/Flexibility/We do what we want when we want	35.9
Child learns in own style/can develop naturally	29.7
Close relationship/Time together	25.1

Learn together about things that matter/A way of life	20.3
No school restraints or bureaucracy/No peer pressure	18.2

Figure 2.1: Parents' descriptions of what home education meant to them (Adapted from Rothermel 2003:80)

The fifth description on Rothermel's list covers quite different aspects of schooling and it would perhaps be more informative if school restraints and peer pressure were listed separately. It would also be interesting to tease out restraints of the specific school such as outdoor space and class sizes from national restraints such as the curriculum and testing. The responses to a question about reasons for home education demonstrated approximately equal numbers of parents stating disappointment with education/schools and ideology (or they always intended to home educate). Because the study design allowed participants to give more than one response, it is difficult to discern whether some parents stated both of these reasons. Other motivations that scored highly were that they were concerned about bullying or that the child was sick, exhausted, stressed, depressed or unhappy in school (Rothermel, 2003).

Another large-scale study used data from a UK national omnibus survey of 6000 families (Smith and Nelson, 2015), reported that of the 52 families that were home educating, most mentioned dissatisfaction with the local school as to the reason why. There were also logistical reasons given such as moving abroad and special circumstances such as health and special needs. Only two of the cases stated philosophical and religious reasons. A

nationwide survey from the United States illustrates similar concerns from a different context in that almost 34% of respondents listed their most important reason for home schooling as concerns about the school environment (e.g. safety, drugs or negative peer pressure) (NHES, 2016).

Since the mid-1980s, researchers have attempted to categorise types of home educators based on their reasons and strategies. Terms such as 'competitors, compensators and rebels' (Blacker, 1985 cited in Rothermel, 2003) and 'pedagogues and ideologues' (Van Galen, 1991) divide families in a very simplistic manner. Most of these studies used very small sample sizes to reach their conclusions. In abovementioned UK study, Rothermel (2003) found her data on reasons for home education did not fit into the categories defined in previous studies and that some 'straddled categories' (Rothermel, 2003:82). A major difference between her UK study in comparison with ones from the USA was that religion was not a motivating factor (with approximately 4% stating it as a reason). Morton (2011) classified reasons for home educating into 'natural, social and last resort'. She is mindful of the fact that there are no clear boundaries of the categories and that families lie on a spectrum. Reasons may change once parents begin their home education journey or, as with Rothermel's (2003) findings, the reason for home educating one child may be different to subsequent children. Isenberg's (2007) analysis of 2003 data (National Household Education Survey) showed special educational needs were amongst the reasons given for home education by 22% of primary and 48% of secondary aged children in the United States.

Improvements in digital technology and the internet have enabled home educating parents to gain access to information, support networks and even buy complete online courses for the children to follow. Some of Lees' (2011) participants discussed how they had entered 'home education' into Google, found the Education Otherwise website or ended up on home educating blogs via looking for alternatives such as Montessori. None of them found out about home education from their Local Authority or the government and some felt advice from official sources was misleading.

There has been little research into the use of digital pedagogies in home education, especially in the UK. In the USA, Neil et al.'s (2014) quantitative study used online surveys of a small number of Texas-based families. The authors found that over 90% of respondents used the internet and email and there was a moderate to heavy reliance on technology. Andrade's (2008) doctoral research used focus groups, interviews, and participant reflection surveys of parents in the Albany area, New York.   He established that access to the internet and technology had enabled parents to home educate more easily and gain information that aided making the decision in the first place. The most common reasons stated for using technology in home schooling were for research, drills, and calculations (Walters, 2015). Fensham-Smith's (2017) study highlighted the role of internet forums and groups for UK home educators. Interestingly, aside from gaining confidence, resources, and knowledge, she identified the online communities mobilising support in response to 'threat' as a significant. The threat in this case was the controversial Badman report (2009) which resulted in the online groups becoming more suspicious of outsiders and more vocal about the perceived benefits of their practice. They also became more exclusionary and forum

gatekeepers/moderators found themselves in the role of vetting newcomers and denying entry to those who did not share the prevailing opinions (Fensham-Smith, 2017).

Technology has been said to have allowed non-traditional families to home educate., an example being the Beery family from the USA who were interviewed for ParentMap.com (Jacobson, 2011). They state that planning for the day only takes five minutes due to their use of DVD tuition and lesson plans. The father works from home while the children study in the morning and the afternoons are spent doing sports and swimming etc. The emergence of online courses and resources that reduce the need for planning frees up more time for the parents to work and may be enabling single parent families to home educate more easily.

The internet has also increased the number of connections that families can make with like-minded others. Home educating parents in Washington, USA, claim to have access to too many activities to fit in and therefore have many possibilities for making connections (Schreiber, 2014). Through the Family Life Program, they can access classes in traditional subjects, field trips, picnics, and clubs such as knitting, science and magic. Families offer a huge amount of support to each other and the children socialise with all ages including adults. Home educators state that their children are more confident in social situations than other children are. Additionally, they can choose with whom to spend their time.

Summary

In this short overview of home education, I provided the legal context of the study and how the UK differs from other countries, both in Europe and around the world. It is comparatively easy to become a home educator in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales; parents are under no obligation to allow LA inspectors into their home (unless there

are safeguarding concerns).   In this chapter, I also explored definitions of home education, alternative provision, and flexi-schooling, as these are not commonly found in the literature and are mentioned throughout the thesis as parents seek different approaches to their child's education. The literature demonstrates that parental motivations for home educating vary, as do categories of home educator. The relatively recent development of internet technologies and social media has eased the transition to becoming a home educator as groups of like-minded people and success stories can be sought out in addition to educational resources and ideas. This was a short literature review with the aim of introducing the context of the study, for a comprehensive review of the history of home education and legal cases see Nelson, 2013.

I return to literature guided by emerging themes from the data in Chapter 6. In the next chapter, I introduce Grounded Theory as a methodology and discuss some debates and controversies that surround its use. I outline the stages of constructivist Grounded Theory and explain reasons for my choice of this particular version.

Chapter 3: Grounded Theory as a methodological approach

Introduction

In this chapter, I explain the history and evolution of Grounded Theory as a research methodology. I justify my choice of constructivist Grounded Theory and briefly outline the stages of the process. Finally, I tackle criticisms of Grounded Theory. In order to distinguish between the two different definitions of the phrase, I capitalise the methodological term, Grounded Theory whist keeping the noun form (to describe my grounded theory and those of others) in lower case. This is not always the case with other authors so this rule will not apply to quotations.

Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory is a methodology first described by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss in the mid-1960s, with the purpose of generating new sociological theories rather than verifying prior ones. They believed 'formal theory was becoming more arid and distant from the worlds of interacting people' (Charmaz, 1990:1163).

Glaser and Strauss state: 'grounded theory can help to forestall the opportunistic use of theories that have dubious fit and working capacity' (1967:4). I agree with this statement in that verification can be restrictive and may lead to the suppression of ideas and perspectives that do not fit. Glaser and Strauss even go as far as reassuring students that they should be confident enough to be creative and trust their own intelligence in generating theory and to go against the traditional 'rigorous rules of verification' (1967:7).

Key features of the original or classic version of Grounded Theory laid out in Glaser and Strauss (1967) are that 'theory emerges from the *data* rather than vice versa' and 'patterns and theories are implicit in data, waiting to be discovered' (Cohen et al., 2007:491 emphasis

in original). Glaser has continued to write with this viewpoint and disagreed with aspects of Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin's subsequent writing as he believed they advocated forcing rather than emergence.

Grounded Theory was originally utilised by sociological researchers, with examples being Glaser and Strauss' 1966 work on awareness of dying, and Charmaz's on coping with chronic illness (Charmaz, 1990). Nowadays a wide range of disciplines such as library studies, dentistry, education, film studies and marketing use Grounded Theory. It is especially suitable for use in fields previously dominated by quantitative methods that show broad patterns but do not reveal the details of the underlying processes or interactions.

Method or methodology?

Later in this chapter, I discuss the controversies and criticisms of Grounded Theory. Here, though I wish to clarify the difference between the terms method and methodology and that considering Grounded Theory as one rather than the other could be the reason for there being so many different uses of the term.

A research method is a tool or strategy for the collection of data that may lead to a specific type of analysis such as a quantitative survey leading to a statistical test. Methodology, on the other hand, is the study of research methods and thus it incorporates a much larger set of considerations including the research paradigm, sampling strategy, analysis and even ethical considerations.

I consider Grounded Theory to be a methodology as it underpins all aspects of the research cycle including defining the research questions, recruitment of participants who will help answer them, coding and defining relationships between the categories. To avoid confusing

the process with the outcome i.e. a grounded theory, Bryant (2017) employs the abbreviation GTM (Grounded Theory Method). He does still seem to be referring to the overall methodology and not just 'methods' however. To avoid confusion, I will be sticking to the term Grounded Theory to represent the principles and stages as intended by the dominant writers in the field: Glaser, Strauss, Corbin and Charmaz. In the words of Barney Glaser:

> *Grounded theory refers to a specific methodology on how to get from systematically collecting data to producing a multivariate conceptual theory. It is a total methodological package. It provides a series of systematic, exact methods that start with collecting data and take the researcher to a theoretical piece that is publishable* (Glaser, 2010:1).

Justification of my choice of methodology

In Grounded Theory studies, the concerns and experiences of the participants are what determines the research question subsequent to the researcher entering the field. I find this aspect of Grounded Theory to be the most exciting and liberating, especially because of the unusual nature of the field where exploratory interviews were carried out: an alternative setting of mainly home educated children. One understandable constraint of being on a PhD programme was that I had to define my focus of inquiry for an end of first-year review. I began with 'The role of technology in home education' but I quickly determined in my open, exploratory interviews that the children were using computers in a very similar way to my own children (e.g. playing games and watching YouTube clips), the parents were the ones using technology the most. I also realised that by starting with very open questions and allowing the participants to express themselves freely, the emotive

parts of the home education journey stood out dramatically. These mainly involved the decision-making process itself. The parents spent much longer talking about their choice to home educate and the obstacles along the way than their current situation. Grounded Theory is a flexible and dynamic approach that not only allows for, but also encourages adaptation and discovery as part of the research journey.

Although I did begin with a potential topic of interest, I was reluctant to follow any of the traditional stages of a research project such as specifying the theoretical framework and detailing the data collection strategy. For this reason, my ethics application included the possibility of all manner of methods such as photographing, video recording and interviewing children. As it happened, I only needed the voices of the parents, but knowing I had permission meant I was unrestricted in my exploration of the setting. Justifying these decisions was only possible because I had thoroughly researched Grounded Theory in the first year of my course. I was aware that the initial interviews were exploratory and had no prior knowledge of the direction the study would need to take. The prospect of recruiting the participants I needed at later stages in the Grounded Theory process felt very natural to me, as opposed to gathering a large quantity of pre-determined data that would have been restrictive and limited my analysis.

Researcher position: Social constructionism

Rather than adopting Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original, objectivist, epistemological stance, I take a social constructionist position throughout this thesis. Glaser's writing leant towards a positivistic ontology whereas, in line with Charmaz (2006), I am of the opinion that there is not just one theory waiting to be discovered but that I play a part in making meaning from the data as well as designing the study and choosing the participants.

Social constructionism is multi-disciplinary and although it does not have one clear origin, the 1966 book by Berger and Luckman 'The social construction of reality' posited many of the elements that are still valid today. The main tenet is that what individuals consider to be common sense, is derived from interactions between individuals for example the meaning of money or what is considered to be normal behaviour. These constructions may have been developed generations ago but make up the institutions and structures we are born into and follow in society. Of course, when we speak to members of our own culture we expect them to picture a school in the same way we do, but how would a group that have not organised educational provision have any idea of what we are talking about?

> *Because most of us share a cultural history, and because we have been exposed to similar systems of education and occupy similar positions of privilege, we will tend to converge in preferences and conventions – from tastes in food and drink to standards of scholarly excellence* (Gergen, 2001:16).

There is no, single definition of social constructionism, but Burr (1996) provides common features as being:

1. *A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge*

2. *Historical and cultural specificity*

3. *Knowledge is sustained by social processes*

4. *Knowledge and social action go together*

(Burr,1996:3-4)

These four principles underpin this study as I question my stance toward mainstream schooling and examine the historical and cultural influences on the participants. Moving

from a science background into the social sciences has also led to my questioning my ontological position. My previous research on nematode worms and fruit flies resulted in outcomes that were reliable and, in one instance, another researcher replicated my findings a few months later before publication. I would classify this sort of study as strongly positivistic. It produced quantitative data with randomised, controlled trials and I could demonstrate significant differences (with the help of statistics software). The overall field of scientific research however, is not the pure quest for truth that I previously believed; rather, it is guided by choices made by humans.

Whether there is one single objective reality or many, dependent on perspective, is the basis of the realism vs relativism argument. Each stance is almost defined by its difference from the other. In this thesis, I will refer to a scepticism of creating binaries a number of times. Gergen (2001) reminds us that there is a spectrum of types of constructionist viewpoints but that a complete division is false in that both camps share common ideas and most accept that there are some objective facts. Stam (2002) called for an end to the constant polarising debate he termed 'rituals of critique' in which academics must remain loyal to one position or another. In recognising the interdisciplinary nature of the topics (psychology, sociology, neuroscience, evolutionary science, the environment) Michael (1996), 'advocates a more relaxed epistemological posture' as the argument between realism and relativism may never be resolved (Michael, 1996:212).

There are seemingly objective statements within the data of this study; for example, how many of the parents considered alternative schools. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the dataset was constructed by the wording of my advertisements, who responded to them, the questions I asked and most importantly, what the parents chose to reveal in their answers and how I interpreted them.

Instead of envisaging humans as separate from society or ruled by it, Sampson (1979 cited in Burr, 1996) encourages us to use the biological concept of ecosystems. Society and individuals interact as part of a system. As a biologist, I appreciate this metaphor. In an ecosystem, all organisms have their specific niche, and they are affected by and affect others. This may involve direct competition for resources or more subtle influences such as faeces adding nutrients to the soil to aid growth of a plant, or the transportation of seeds to a new area for example, by being attached to the fur of an animal. As with this study, there are subtle influences at play from a variety of sources, some of which are beyond the individual's control. The past and the present, the internal and the external all play their part.

I have learned to accept that the reality of my participants is very different from mine. The role of school and even parenting also varies massively between different cultures and throughout history (see Chapter 6 for further detail). Most social constructionists hold the opinion that language creates our reality. An example of this is our categorising of colours in that there are cultures who divide the rainbow differently to Westerners for example, the Berinmo from Papua New Guinea who have five colours (Barrett, 2017a). Language is also involved in the labelling of our feelings for example, there are foreign words to describe emotions that do not have and English translation such as *schadenfreude* in German which describes gaining pleasure from someone else's pain and *saudade* in Portugese which is a sadness due to the absence of someone. Barrett (2017a) reminds us that the categories of emotions such as anger, sadness and happiness used in modern research are not objective or universal. They are Americanised terms; no longer assumed to be felt and recognised by all.

Social constructionists acknowledge the role of language in our construction of reality, as the concepts we use to describe our world can only have a shared meaning if others use the same terms. There are many ways to describe non-mainstream education settings and the language used greatly affects the image we form of a place. An example of this is how describing a setting as alternative compared to the terms unregistered or illegal.   These terms are a reflection of the government policies and laws in place at the time. Clearly, the term home education would not have been used before the introduction of compulsory schooling. As I explained in Chapter 2, flexi schooling is a recent term, and its acceptance varies from school to school (even within the same LA).

In this thesis, I propose that those who challenge existing social structures may become agents of change if enough individuals share similar views. By constructing new categories of educational setting, the default habits of mainstream acceptance of school are beginning to be questioned. We are witnessing transitions in process and it is possible to trace these by studying, not only parents who desire a different way of life, but the way that the press and politicians respond to these changes. Burr (2015) believes social constructionism as it stands cannot fully answer how individuals can change society, as she argues in the quotation that follows.

> *A further problem that social constructionist accounts run into is how to explain the desires, wants, hopes and fantasies of a person and their role in the choices that person makes in their lives. To say that people are negotiators of positions, or that their subjectivity is formed by discourses is inadequate; such phenomena, which are after all very real experiences for us, become relegated to a kind of side effect of discourse. But most importantly, it fails to explain why, even in the face of an*

understanding of the implications of discourse for our identity and the power

relations in which we are thereby embedded, we do not feel free to choose an

alternative way of life (Burr, 2015:205).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

An early internal debate in my PhD journey was whether I needed to be an objective

outsider, or could I bring my experience into the study? Upon reading books by, and

watching YouTube interviews with Kathy Charmaz, I gained reassurance that my perspective

as a researcher is important and can be useful. She writes about constructivist Grounded

Theory (2006). This approach moves Grounded Theory away from positivism as it makes no

claims to be objective and by doing so, a different epistemological stance is taken.

Greckhamer and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) define changes to the original Grounded Theory

methodology as 'erosion'; this term implies reshaping but not necessarily damaging or

breaking it. The constructivist approach is very similar to the classic version of Grounded

Theory in that categories are formed from groups of codes and that constant comparative

analysis, memoing and theoretical sampling are undertaken. The perspectives of the

researcher and the participants are acknowledged though, and the theory is co-constructed

by them both. I agree with Charmaz's (2006) viewpoint that it impossible to dissociate from

who I am when interpreting the stories and actions of the participants. She states that:

> *… grounded theorists start with data. We construct these data through our*
>
> *observations, interactions and materials that we gather about out topic or setting*
>
> (Charmaz, 2006:3).

Unlike objectivist classic Grounded Theory, constructivist Grounded Theory does not

assume that there is one reality waiting to be discovered. The researcher is interpreting the

scene and the participant's responses (including emotions) from their own perspective. This may be very different from that of another researchers. The codes applied and the theory that develops also depend on the researcher having chosen what is significant. In addition, the participant is selecting what to talk about from the incidents that stand out in their memory.

During the process of carrying out this research, my position as an outsider and ex-teacher changed as I entered the alternative setting for the technology project (before I embarked on my doctoral research). As a result, I was able to freely enter participants' homes and become part of the community of staff and parents. This was not the case when I advertised for participants from the wider public via online forums, Facebook and a variety of physical noticeboards. From the perspectives of these parents, I was simply an unknown researcher, and this felt like being a 'cold caller'. In Chapter 4, I discuss my recruitment strategy and the role of an intermediary in making introductions. Although not a full member of their community, I was afforded free access to the setting during sessions as well as meetings with the staff before undertaking interviews for the exploratory phase of this study. Holmes (2020) reminds us that there are benefits and disadvantages of researching for an internal (or emic position) but also that it is a sliding scale rather than a binary. I believe I gained the best of both worlds as I could understand the setting but retained an etic (outsider) perspective as I had not made the choice for my child to attend.

Researcher position can alter over time and I noted mine to have changed during the study. Not only did I move from being an 'insider' of sorts in the exploratory interviews to an 'outsider' in the ones recruited via other means, but occurrences in the personal lives of my children and my emotional responses to my findings affected my positionality. For instance,

I was able to empathise with those whose children were unhappy in school when my youngest child became distressed in the playground each morning in year four. The more I read about the benefits of flexi-schooling, the more I wanted to try it for myself and I even asked permission of the Head teacher (this was granted but after a period of helping in the classroom and observing my child's behaviour, I changed my mind). This incident likely led to my decision to seek participants who, after researching home or alternative education, decided against it. Being a parent has undoubtedly influenced my research. Not only in forming connections to put the participants at ease, but in forming the categories themselves. An example of this would be that I have encountered some of the same obstacles as the parents in the study such as making compromises with my career, choosing suitable childcare and moving house to be near a school. These experiences shaped my research, and I do not believe a non-parent would have constructed the same categories. In his 1988 paper 'In Search of Subjectivity: One's Own', Peshkin reminds us that our personal qualities can 'filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe and misconstrue' at every stage of the research process (Peshkin, 1988:17). Early in my doctoral journey, I decided to write a memo about my past-experiences and opinions. Earlier drafts of this thesis included numerous personal reflections on incidents from my own life that enabled me to connect with the participants' stories. I omitted the majority of these for ethical reasons (as they included my children, parents and grandparents) but would like to acknowledge that I am very much aware of my subjectivity causing some statements to stand out more than others.

Charmaz (2008) believes that, although social constructionists view the worlds they research as social constructions, they do not normally hold the same opinion of their research practices. She recommends that we:

- *Treat the research process **itself** as a social construction*

- *Scrutinize research decisions and directions*

- *Improvise methodological and analytic strategies throughout the research process*

- *Collect sufficient data to discern and document how research participants construct their lives and worlds*

(Charmaz, 2008:403 emphasis in original)

In this study, I acknowledge myself as being a co-constructor of the data rather than being an objective observer (Charmaz, 2006). My choice of methodology, the participants I recruited, questions asked and my responses to the interviewees' answers were all constructed by me. Like Peshkin (1988), I noted my emotional responses to some of the research findings and this may have influenced my coding, choices of quotations, the relationships I built between the categories and even the other concepts I felt were relevant to extend my theory. Finally, the participants construct their answers based on their memories and opinions; at no point do I claim to have discovered the 'truth'.

I believe that interactions vary greatly from one researcher-participant pairing to the next. For example, some researchers make the participants feel at ease whilst others convey a feeling of being interrogated. My choice of question or points I asked my participants to elaborate on are also a factor. Might I skip over a crucial aspect in a fast-paced interview? The search for meaning behind their answers is also a very subjective process. Was there a tremor of distress in their voice? Did they express relief or was tension building in the anecdote? A researcher that is in tune with the participant, or who has had similar experiences may read these subtle clues in a very different way to another. By gaining

theoretical sensitivity of the research context and combining this with the newly acquired data, I could develop deeper insights in light of the societal pressures and possibilities present.

Stages of Grounded Theory

Open coding

In Grounded Theory, the interview transcripts (or observation records) are line-by-line coded to look for actions and incidents that are occurring. Glaser suggests that one codes incidents as many ways as possible 'running the data open' (Glaser, 1978:56). These codes could be short, precise interpretations of one's own, or *in vivo* codes which are phrases the participants state directly. *In vivo* codes can be common terms known to all, a term the participant made up which describes meaning well or, 'insider' terms only known to that group of people (Charmaz, 2006). Early coding should be very open and stay close to the data. The codes are not preconceived or based on other theories, but they should give ideas about where to look next. A new insight might lead to looking back over earlier transcripts for other examples, asking different questions, or seeking new participants.

Focused coding

Focused codes cover larger bodies of text than line-by-line coding. Judgements are made by the researcher such as what are they doing? What strategies are they implementing? Are there conditions of constraint? Are there relationships or interactions? Focussed codes tend to be formed after themes have developed in the open coding. Previous data is returned to once new themes are identified.

Memoing

Memos are 'the narrated records of a theorist's analytical conversations with him/herself about the research data' (Lempert, 2007:247). Ideas enter one's mind during transcription and coding which may be fleeting or seem unconnected at the time but may be useful when building the theory. Barney Glaser writes passionately on the fact that memoing should be done continually right up to the end of the study. 'If the analyst skips this stage by going directly from coding to sorting or writing - he is *not* doing grounded theory' (Glaser, 1978:83 emphasis in original). The concern is that ideas will be forgotten so they can be banked in a 'memo fund' to be sorted at a later date. He advocates writing freely without concern for punctuation to quickly record an idea. All versions of Grounded Theory include memoing as a critical component.

Asking questions of the data is a good way to begin reflection. For example, why did the participants use a particular word? Moving from description to conceptualisation can be difficult, but memoing can aid this process as categories are illuminated with examples, and codes are explored in the memos. It can also identify gaps and determine the direction for the next part of the study (Lempert, 2007).

Some researchers include personal memos in their writing with examples such as O'Driscoll (2016) and Lees (2011) justifying their choice of topic with personal recollections and poignant incidents in their history. I realised there were ethical issues involved in using the memos where I had reflected on my children's experiences or that of my parents or grandparents as this thesis will be publicly accessible and they have had no say in me drawing upon their stories. I decided to omit them from the final version of this thesis.

Constant comparative analysis (CCA)

Bryant (2017) asserts that the 'method of constant comparison' is an alternative name for Grounded Theory itself as it is a central tenet of the process. Comparing incidents in the data to previous ones and going 'back and forth' helps to define properties of the categories and eventually enables the researcher to determine relationships between them. The term 'constant comparative analysis' has since been adopted by non-grounded theorists as a technique and some are naming it a method in itself. Fram (2013) discusses the usefulness of using CCA but with a pre-chosen theoretical framework, her justification being that so many researchers use CCA but not the other stages of Grounded Theory.

Theoretical coding

Once one has saturated the categories with examples to the point where no new types of incident are appearing in the data, theoretical coding is carried out. The relationships between the categories are examined. Sorting of memos written during the study is crucial at this stage. The memos are records of the theory as it is starting to be constructed.

Glaser offers a comprehensive list of coding families to assist in this process. They are non-specific though as he does not advocate using codes from previous studies.

Theoretical sampling

Theoretical sampling is the recruitment of more participants, further questioning of previous ones or collection of data from other sources. It allows the researcher to move from the identification of local concepts and problems, to the development of a theory illustrated by examples from a variety of participants or settings. The exciting part of this procedure is that the researcher does not know from where the next data is to be gathered.

This is summarised by the quote below, as Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend, no research questions were proposed at the start of the study.

> *The emerging theory points to the next steps-the sociologist does not know them until he is guided by emerging gaps in his theory and by research questions suggested by previous answers* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:47).

This facet of Grounded Theory provides the researcher with a way to investigate different avenues as the study progresses. I would feel very constrained knowing I had a limited number of participants and could not pursue new ones with different experiences if need be. The downside to this method of recruitment is that it is very time consuming. Studies with one round of data gathering are undoubtedly quicker but do not allow as much flexibility.

Member checking

There are various ways to employ member checking or participant validation. In its simplest form, member checking means presenting raw transcripts back to the participants. Alternatively, the researcher could show the analysed data to individuals/focus groups or explain the final grounded theory to them (Patton, 2002).

Unexpected problems arose when Carlson (2010) presented verbatim transcripts back to her participants. One interviewee, embarrassed by the grammar in the transcript, withdrew from the study; others made numerous changes. Next, there is the issue with time, participants have already given up part of their day to be interviewed, expecting them to read a few pages of writing and make more comments or be re-interviewed could be demanding too much from them. Finally, allowing participants to change what they originally said allows people to 'reconstruct their narrative'; this may be a good thing if the

interview transcript does not represent what they meant to say but it raises the question of who 'owns' the data (Birt et al., 2016:1803).

Charmaz (2006) recommends member checking to ascertain whether the theory tells the participants' story. Conversely, Glaser (2002) holds the opinion that the theory is not be presented back to the participants to test its validity as it has been produced from a collection of voices, so may not be representative of just one of them.

> *They may or may not understand the theory, or even like the theory if they do understand it: Many do not understand the summary benefit of concepts that go beyond description to a transcending bigger picture* (Glaser, 2002:25).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) did state however that a substantive grounded theory should make sense to people working in the area in order for them to be able to use it. They may not be able to understand formal theory due to 'its abstractness and presumed general applicability. It will have to be explained to them for them to understand its usefulness, and chances are they will not be able to apply it themselves' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:240). I am confident that the parents in my study are intelligent enough to understand my writing, and therefore believe it to be a patronising viewpoint that the researcher is somehow elevated above those that have such an important role in co-producing the data. With this in mind, I presented my grounded theory to the final two participants immediately after hearing their stories. I described each category and subcategory and repeated back to them my interpretation of how their journey contained elements of the stages. Where they had not mentioned one of the subcategories for instance, parenting style, I asked if they had anything to add about that. This is a useful way of verifying the theory and finding further examples to move closer to saturation point.

Theorising

Skidmore (1979) asks 'Why theorize?' He believes that without it 'we would be left with a jumble of data and impressions that would only cry out for arrangement and interpretation' (1979:13).   Finding relationships between the facts gives them meaning and raising them to concepts gives the possibility of explanation and prediction. However, concepts are not easy to describe. Some researchers find it easy to conceptualise, but to others, it does not come naturally; this is often the reason that some Grounded Theory studies stop short of developing a new theory (Glaser, 2002).

I found Saldaña's explanation of concepts to be very useful. He states that they cannot be touched; an example being that toys are not a concept, but play is (Saldaña, 2011). Concepts relating to action and interactions are likely to be identified early in the research process and asking questions about the conditions and contexts which lead to these actions is important. Why were the consequences as they were? Grouping these concepts into categories and looking for relationships between them leads to early theorising. A core category may emerge which occurs frequently in the data and easily links to other categories (Bruscaglioni, 2016).

> *Classic grounded theory works toward achieving a core or central category that conceptually represents what the study is all about. This core or central category becomes the foundation for generating a theory about the process observed* (Saldaña, 2011:7).

In my view, no matter how long one stares at the data, a theory will not just emerge via induction alone. Instead, abduction is needed which is the process of bringing together ideas and data (Richardson and Kramer, 2006). I believe creative abduction to be essential

in Grounded Theory research as my ideas will lead to construction of the theory, and any thoughts that arise will have been influenced by prior experiences and reading.

Drawing on the experiences of others is essential, but the researcher cannot separate themselves from their past and present. It is recommended that one 'cultivate such reflections on personal experiences' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:252). King and Horrocks warn not to allow this to become 'a rather embarrassing form or self-indulgence where the researcher takes centre stage' (King and Horrocks, 2010:128). Clearly, researchers may be motivated to study a particular area because of their personal interests but the advice is to only contribute with one's own story if it adds to the discussion.

Furniss et al. (2011) use the phrase 'theory bridging' to describe their use of prior theories and new ones. They believe serendipity to play a part along with being intimate with the data. As the data is always at the back of my mind I can relate to this position; many conversations, seminars and visits to the library have fostered new connections to theory I had not considered previously. Avis (2003) is concerned that some methodological theories such as phenomenology, ethnography and Grounded Theory are used to justify research that is not open to critical scrutiny and does not locate the claims to knowledge amongst the wider set of beliefs. He advocates a more pragmatic approach that does not necessarily rely on the strict adherence to methodological procedures but acknowledges wider sociological theory: 'given that all evidence arises in the context of surrounding theory, intellectual debate should be about getting theories into conversation with each other to enlarge the possibilities of agreement' (2003:1003-4). Urquhart (2013) names this stage theoretical integration. She looks at her grounded theories in light of other theories, in her case in the field of information systems.

A crucial aspect of the classical Grounded Theory approach is that the researcher enters the field with an open mind. Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original advice was to avoid having any pre-conceived hypotheses before gathering the data. Familiarisation with the literature is needed to develop theoretical sensitivity of the context, but the researcher should remain open to new interpretations of what she sees. A common misconception is that the researcher should be a blank slate. Urquhart and Fernández debunked this myth in their 2013 article. They believe it to be pervasive and harmful, and its roots lie in superficial reading of the 1967 Discovery book where Glaser and Strauss recommended setting aside extant literature, being sensitive to concepts but not having preconceived ideas or theories when entering the setting.

Researchers can acquire theoretical sensitivity in a number of ways. Hoare et al. (2012) described it as 'dancing with data'. The authors included an informative diagram in order to break down the stages and show how they gained additional information. In the hospital setting, they made use of observation and questioning, initial coding, and professional experience (as well as reading the literature and reflecting in memos). I increased my sensitivity by reading general home education books and websites and attending the alternative educational setting over a three-month period as part of another project. Clearly, I had to make use of journal articles in order to write the project proposal, but these mainly focussed on the legal and historical aspects of home education rather than any theories about decision-making for example. Being intimately familiar with prior theories can be very useful in that 'it fosters giving the research greater conceptual depth and breadth' (Charmaz 1990:11). There may be the problem, however if the researcher is

constrained by their knowledge of these theories and finds it difficult to develop their own ideas.

A broad literature review was necessary to identify gaps in the current body of knowledge. Reading prior research also aided my understanding of how to carry out Grounded Theory studies; this was often from other disciplines such as nursing and management. Reading too much on the area of interest can be a disadvantage to grounded theorists. For example, Hickey (1997) found that his literature review on district nurse's concerns led him to presume that care management was a major factor. Upon entering the field, he found that care management did not register as a concern for his participants. Once the themes and direction of the study have been determined and a theory has started to be developed, the literature is then used as data.

Lempert (2007) recommends turning to the literature during the process of data collection, memoing, coding and writing. I am in agreement with her that it helps determine whether an idea is something innovative or simply a previous discovery of which I am unaware. She does not let it define her research (Lempert, 2007). Carmichael and Cunningham used a 'hybrid model'. They describe as being: 'literature neither ignored, nor was a comprehensive review conducted until after the research was complete' (Carmichael and Cunningham 2017:64).

Although it is somewhat unusual for doctoral research, this study began without a theoretical framework. A researcher could use previous theory as a starting point but if the data she is gathering does not work with that theory then it must be abandoned. 'Keep in mind that the whole purpose of doing a grounded theory is to develop a theoretical explanatory framework, so why would a researcher want to begin the research with one'

(Corbin and Strauss, 2015: 52). Once the grounded theory began to develop it is positioned in relation to prior theories (Charmaz, 2006), some of which may not have seemed relevant before data collection began. An awareness of sociological theories is very useful, and one cannot unlearn the ones that are already known about.

A theoretical lens is counterproductive in Grounded Theory studies although Mitchell (2014) defends his use of Lin's (1999) Network Theory of Social Capital to determine the questions he asked and to focus the investigation whilst still allowing themes to emerge. He believes that using a theoretical framework turns the research into a deductive rather than inductive process. However, he is of the opinion that all Grounded Theory studies utilise deductive reasoning as the researcher is bringing their opinions of the research setting to the study whether they acknowledge it or not.

Glaser and Strauss argue that 'the masters have not provided enough theories to cover all the areas of social life that sociologists have only begun to explore' (1967:11). I feel that this sentence describes my viewpoint precisely; until I find out what matters to the participants and how they go about their daily lives, I cannot speculate as to which theory would be applicable.

The theoretical or conceptual framework is a controversial aspect of Grounded Theory with the original premise by Glaser and Strauss (1967) being that the data would speak for itself and not be forced into preconceived categories. It is of course, impossible to take an unbiased position and everything the researcher has read or experienced in their lives will be part of the theory's construction.

The purpose of a theoretical framework is to demonstrate the interaction and relationship among a set of concepts, which, as a whole, describe a more complicated phenomenon (Heale and Noble, 2019:36).

I argue that, because I was unaware of the phenomenon I was about to research, I could not predetermine which theories would be relevant. To answer the question posed by others about which theoretical framework I was using, I had to explain the fundamental principles of Grounded Theory.

Urquhart and Fernandez recommend a preliminary literature review at the 'noncommittal phase' when defining the problem and methods are being chosen, a thematic literature review at the 'integrative phase' when open coding and theoretically coding and looking for emerging theory from memos etc. A theoretical literature review may begin at the latter part of this stage and continue when the theory is being formulated to allow it to be integrated amongst other theories (Urquhart and Fernández, 2013). This is what has happened quite naturally in this study. For example, when I identified the theme of feelings, I sought literature about attitudes, affect, parenting and emotions in decision-making from fields other than education.

Criticisms of Grounded Theory

Researchers carried out early Grounded Theory studies in an era dominated by the positivist tradition. Many fields where quantitative data collection methods formerly prevailed have since employed qualitative methods to 'get inside' situations for example, information science (see Ellis, 1993). Objectivist approaches viewed human subjects' behaviour in a similar way to that of the natural sciences for example by aiming for precision, reliability and

generalisability. Corbin and Strauss warn readers to 'guard against the dangers that lie in their positivist connotations' (1990:4).

Grounded Theory is 'a methodology that divides opinions – sharply' (Nelson 2015:18). Thomas and James (2006) give a scathing criticism of many aspects of Grounded Theory, including the use of the terms 'discovery', 'ground' and 'theory'. They conclude that the rigidity of the procedures and fracturing and categorising the data 'relegates the original voice'. Their argument is that descriptive accounts and narratives make very good studies without the over-reliance on method. I agree with many aspects of their critique; however, it seems to be predominantly based on the writing of Glaser and Strauss. I believe that constructivist Grounded Theory moves beyond the focus just being on the procedures. Charmaz (2006) suggests that the methods are guidelines, not rules. Nelson (2015) admits that his initial assumptions about Grounded Theory were naïve. He disputes Thomas and James' (2006) dismissal of the methodology in his paper despite agreeing with some of their opinions on the classical version. He concludes, and I agree, that the researcher must maintain a balance and to engage in the wider research community.

Numerous authors document difficulties with using Grounded Theory and/or their struggle with which approach to use (see Nelson, 2015, Wilson, 2012). Christina Goulding's (2001) article title of 'Grounded Theory: A Magical Formula or Potential Nightmare' captures the mood of many novice researchers. Is it an easy, step-by-step route into qualitative research or a laborious, unpredictable journey which may or may not result in a theory at the end? Having read these and embarked on said journey, I feel it is stimulating and flexible. I have 'permission' to be creative and direct the study elsewhere in light of new findings, following the trail as it appears in front of me. Urquhart (2013) felt 'excitement and passion' from

being so close to her data during her PhD. She believes that this closeness helps with the development of insights and innovation.

Many studies claiming to use Grounded Theory (analysed in the *Academy of Management Journal*) used parts of the approach in their analysis e.g. open coding and memoing but did not mention theoretical sampling or continue until they reach saturation (Locke, 1996). Fram (2013) argues for the use of the constant comparative aspect of Grounded Theory as a standalone method as around a third of researchers claiming to use Grounded Theory use a theoretical framework or have no intention of developing a substantive theory. These differing and sometimes incomplete approaches cause confusion and, for a novice researcher such as myself, make it difficult to find examples of good practice.

Morton (2011) used constant comparison in her thesis on home education and mentions Glaser and Strauss (1967). She writes that she is using deductive and inductive approaches. She makes no mention of Grounded Theory again after claiming that 'The concurrency of data collection and analysis meant that my ongoing analysis directed the data collection process drawing on some of the principles of grounded theory' (Morton 2011: 94).

Urquhart et al. (2010) state that some researchers use the term 'Grounded Theory' to label a method of coding data with no attempt at theorising. Theory building, of course is what the Grounded Theory process was designed to lead to. I am of the opinion that the problem of mis or partial use is exacerbated when the methodology is introduced as a coding strategy in introductory research methods books such as Curtis et al.'s (2013) Research and education.

Numerous papers document the research process in a Grounded Theory study (see Urquhart and Fernández, 2013, Sbaraini et al., 2011). Furniss et al. presented their 'lessons

learnt' in their 2011 conference proceedings paper. Practical recommendations are given and reassurance that extant theory can be used for gaining insight and inspiring creativity. They also conclude that Grounded Theory is no longer seen as a purely inductive process. They do warn, however that researcher bias and inhibition of what the data has to say for itself can be potential pitfalls. Once the theory is developed, engaging with other theories in the field is crucial to deepen and enrich it (Urquhart, 2013).

At a small conference early in my study, I was asked: 'What makes a theory different from just explaining the data?' To help with this, I turn to Kathy Charmaz who states:

> *In my view, a theory explicates a phenomena, specifies concepts which categorize the relevant phenomena, explains relationships between concepts and provides a framework for making predictions* (Charmaz, 1990:1164).

Grounded theories are usually 'low' theories in that they are not generalizable like 'high' theory. They are context specific but can be expanded upon with more cases and applied in other areas. Substantive theory is achievable, and Glaser discusses this as one of the aims of the methodology. They devote a chapter of 'Discovery' to the production of formal theory. One example described is that the substantive theory category 'social loss of dying patients' could be expanded to develop a formal theory on 'social value of people' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:42).

Being only applicable to a very narrow setting means that the grounded theory produced is not open to criticism and testing according to Goldthorpe (2000). He is strongly opposed to the 'adhoccery' of Grounded Theory as the inductive approach means changes are made to the research questions and no pre-determined hypothesis is verified. Charmaz states that grounded theorists begin with general research questions but 'if, perchance, these research

questions are irrelevant in the field, then they develop new, suitable ones or find another field' (Charmaz, 1990:1162).

Beginning without a theoretical framework may be a daunting prospect for some but the key with Grounded Theory is that the researcher builds the framework from the data rather than from the literature. This is a liberating process but may make it difficult to pass important milestones in the PhD process. Urquhart (2013) reminds us that we are not testing theory; but building it. The problem with the controversy Grounded Theory faces is that often the discussion focusses on how the theories are produced rather than their content (Urquhart, 2013).   In addition, the time spent having to choose which version to proceed with and justify its usage to supervision teams may deter some students who have time constraints. Urquhart (2013) shares my observation that some departments have preferred ways of going about research and it is wise to stick within those areas if one is seeking a future position in that group.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored the history and different versions of Grounded Theory as a methodology. There have been numerous criticisms of Grounded Theory, so I presented a range of these and justified my choice. I laid out my social constructionist epistemology and described why I feel closely aligned with Kathy Charmaz's writing on constructivist Grounded Theory. I briefly outlined the stages that are crucial in the Grounded Theory process and in the next chapter, I describe how I designed my research study, collected and analysed my data as well as recounting how I constructed my grounded theory.

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the stages of the Grounded Theory study. I introduce my
participants, the age(s) of their child(ren), their circumstances and how they were recruited.
I provide examples to demonstrate how I coded the transcripts, analysed the data, and
constructed the categories. I also discuss ethical considerations and difficulties encountered
during the research process. Finally, I introduce the grounded theory of **Stepping out of the
system?**

Sampling and participants

As stated in the introduction, much home education research has been carried out by
parents who have easy access to participants and groups because the researcher has a
connection to those communities (or is even a practising home educator themselves).
Qualified teacher, Kelly (2008) declares herself to be an 'insider' researcher as she too had
been a home educator. In the 1970s, she resigned from her job in order to home educate as
she felt her three children were not ready for the formal instruction methods used in
schools. The participants interviewed in her Hawaiian study were described as pioneers due
to the small number of home educating parents at that time and they were naturally
suspicious of outsiders (she was able to recruit via acquaintances). Home educators in
general resist being exposed to interrogation and, according to Lees (2011) and Fensham-
Smith (2017) this stance has been exacerbated in the UK by the 2009 Badman review, in
that gatekeepers and forum moderators are now wary of the intentions of new members.
Mayberry (1988) states that home schoolers in the USA also prefer to avoid formal
organisations. Rothermel's (2002) large-scale UK study came before the Badman review

and she gained access to many home educators' homes in order to carry out academic assessments and interviews. Of her 5000 surveys distributed via local authorities, home education networks and forums, she received 1000 back and chose 419 families to participate further. Her sample represented all social classes and types of family and broke down the stereotypical middle-class nuclear family image held by some. I decided to try to gain depth rather than breadth in my study. Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend carefully selected cases rather than trying to gain a large, random sample. A concept or category can be gained from one case and then properties of it sought in the ones that follow.

I undertook opportunistic sampling (Tracy, 2019) subsequent to carrying out another project at the part time alternative setting. Whilst there, I had gained trust from the parents and children and three of the mothers invited me into their homes. I refrain from outlining further details about the setting and its proprietor in order not to reveal their identities. The text between each table of participants documents the stages of theoretical sampling. This, and the section on coding later in the chapter, makes up part of an 'audit trail'. Logging memos and the coded transcripts in NVivo also form a record of the decisions made during the research process, in some studies, this would be scrutinised by external verifiers to ensure credibility (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). Other recommendations for ensuring validity are researcher reflexivity, looking for disconfirming evidence (as in the cases that rejected home education after considering it) and member checking (as occurred with the final two participants) Cresswell and Miller (2000).

Table 4.1 Participants recruited in first round of exploratory interviews

Participant number/Location of interview/job if relevant	Age of child(ren) at first interview	Summary of situation and how resolved
1 (interviewed at alternative education setting) *Part time lecturer and director of alternative setting*	6	Moved from her native country in order to establish nursery and alternative setting with her partner which son attends four days and 'forest type' school one day per week. P1 had very unhappy recollections of her school days and felt she was labelled a failure from the age of six. Believed son was very alert and that school was full of rules. Studied Foucault (biopower, institutions) whilst at university. Did not want to home educate but wanted an alternative she could control and not have to outsource.
2 (interviewed at home)	6 and 3	Eldest daughter attends the above alternative setting one day per week. P2 home educates the rest of the week and sees it as part of normal life i.e. not stopping at weekends. She knew some people who home educated and read a book on 'free-range' education. The children take part in classes such as ballet, drama, French, art, gymnastics. P2 recalled being moved to a private school as a small child after her parents had concerns about the state school environment. Her husband agreed with the decision from the start but she felt he might want to send them to school at some point and want more structure. P2 did not like the idea of being back at work and taking one child to nursery and the other to before/after school clubs etc.
3 and 4 (separated and interviewed individually-home and Skype)	9	Daughter attends the above alternative setting three days and 'forest type' school one day per week. Both parents use an autonomous approach to home education but their child sees ex-SENCO teacher for maths and English. Father (P4) is from a US state where home education is commonplace so suggested this to ex-partner (P3) when child was experiencing anxiety symptoms at school due to class size and noise. Child could not settle in school from the start, she did not understand why she had to go every day and was not just playing any more. They were told they could not flexi-school. P3 felt a lot of fear about the decision and carried out research from books,

		Facebook and speaking to a home educator a friend knew.
5 (interviewed at home)	7 and 4	Eldest continually asked not to go to nursery when 2/3 years old so P5 pulled her out (when she found out about home education from NCT friend). Before that, she thought school was compulsory. The same friend gave her book on child development and attachment and told her they did not start formally till the age of 7 in Scandinavia. Daughters attend the above alternative setting one day per week and eldest also attends the forest-type school one day. P5 home educates rest of the week and employs part-time nanny so she can work. P5 uses an unstructured approach but eldest uses 'reading eggs' online scheme whenever she wants to. She is very active in home educating community (online and activities).Her husband was reticent at first and just wanted them to be 'normal'. She is going to let the children decide in the future, but knows that high school has more resources e.g. in science.

Coding these interviews led me to realise that there was very little said about technology, my initial focus, but that the parents spoke with passion about the educational decision-making process. As stated in Chapter 3, in Grounded Theory studies, theoretical sampling is guided by the responses in early interviews.

My next round of recruitment focussed on home educators and users of alternative education because the initial participants were using a combination of the two. I also added flexi-schoolers to the advertisement as I wished to find out the full range of experiences of non-mainstream educators.

Some of the participants talked about a local 'forest type' school so I interviewed the leader by phone. Advertising at the alternative setting's adjacent nursery also led to two mothers volunteering to take part. This would be considered an opportunistic sample (Tracy, 2019). I was intending to have a more varied sample, but approaching national and local home

education Facebook groups directly provided no response. I was excited to hear about a local person on Facebook who ran a session for those thinking about home education. A mutual friend recommended I contact her but the communication ended disappointingly despite my approach which I hoped would be received as pleasant and non-intrusive. This person cited incidents where researchers had depicted home education in a negative light as a reason for not supporting my study.

A relative with a small child put an advert for me on Facebook groups (such as early years, attachment parenting, sling wearing and late birthdays); this led to around twenty responses from home educators and flexi-schoolers. However, some of these did not reply once I had sent them the participant information sheet.

Table 4.2: Participants recruited in second round

Participant number, interview details and job if education related	Age of child(ren) at first interview	Summary of situation and how resolved
6 (recruited via university colleague- interviewed in a café) *Lecturer*	6	P6's experiences of school were from abroad and she had no local knowledge or friends with children. Had been reading home education blogs since before daughter was born, but would not want to do it full time. P6 had bad experiences of her child becoming distressed at a well-regarded private nursery she attended from 7 to 19 months of age. P6 is a single mother and wanted to pursue her academic career so needed childcare. She would have had a nanny if finances had allowed. She researched childminders who were advocates of attachment parenting. Her childminder now home educates P6's daughter alongside her own (18 months older). The childminder participates in groups/activities and often reads about education and parenting. She would like to run a small school with up to ten children. The children spend a lot of time outdoors and P6 believes her child to be flourishing and having fewer illnesses now out of

		nursery. P6 feels she is not part of the home education community as she works in the daytime when they meet. P6 turned town a better job in London to remain near this childminder. Would have chosen a Montessori school if there was one available but feels Steiner schools are too 'culty'.
7 (recruited via poster at nursery-interviewed at her home) *Teaching assistant in pupil referral unit/ studying for psychology Masters*	4	P7 had experience of growing up on a traveller site around lots of home educated children. She also knows people who home educate through festivals etc. She did attend school but was bullied about her race so was withdrawn (but believes she just played in the woods rather than being home educated). Her daughter attends the alternative setting's nursery/kindergarten three days, 'forest type' school one day per week and is home educated one day per week. Childcare vouchers pay the fees but P7 is likely to travel or home educate fully if unable to afford these settings in the future. P7 is a single parent and the child's father trusted her judgment in making the decision. She believes education is about the process rather than the outcome.
8 (recruited via parents who utilise her 'forest style' school-phone interview) *Director of alternative setting*	14 and 11	P8 was not supported by her employers when she wanted to go part-time after the birth of her first child, so left her professional career. She bought local woodland she saw for sale after her sister praised forest schooling. P8 felt that a lot of academic success comes with self-doubt and judgement, which affects confidence. She underwent training and now runs a school based on some of the forest school principles. P8 withdrew her children from primary school after flexi-schooling to attend the 'forest type' setting full-time (up to age of 11). P8 was providing the primary school with sessions in the woods but wanted to take her children out two days per week (when only one day of flexi schooling was permitted by the head teacher). She felt anxious making the decision and was reluctant to leave the community of parents she knew through school. She was also a school governor. The girls were doing very well at an independent high school at time of interview.
9 (recruited via a relative on Facebook-1 phone interview in	4 and 2	P9 was always passionate about child development and felt formal education started too early. She researched home education when

September '16 and one email update in March '17)		eldest was approaching school age and a parent from the same school raised her awareness of flexi-schooling. Requested 2 days at home but was told it had to be 5 mornings. Flexi-schooled eldest until compulsory school age (one day at home) was considering home education at start of study and met other parents though a forest school mother and baby group. P9 used Facebook groups for legal information etc. and had a teacher friend who warned that home educated/Steiner educated children sometimes struggle with inflexible college curricula as they are used to following their interests. Did not choose to fully home educate as had caring responsibility for mother-in-law. Full-time school attendance at last contact (email) because child reached compulsory school age and head teacher refused to grant permission to flexi school any longer. Could not move to a new house nearer a school that would allow flexi as needed to stay near family.
10 (recruited via relative on Facebook-1 phone interview) *Ex-primary school teacher*	4 and 2	P10 home educates and is an attachment parenting advocate. She had knowledge of local schools due to being a teacher for a year and thought a lot of teachers feel the academic pressures are too much. She believed there was a lot of behaviour management, sitting quietly and no time to fully answer children's questions. P10 heard about home education from a friend who home educated a child who is now 14. She thought this choice was 'odd' at the time. She mainly researched via the friend but later found lots of local groups to attend. P10 managed to convince her husband but stated he was not keen and thought she was 'mad' at first. She would let child go to school if he chose to but has no set age in mind to stop home educating.
11 (recruited via relative on Facebook group-1 phone interview	4 and 6 months	11 flexi-schools her son 2 half days per week in order to teach him about her language and culture. She found out through a parent at the school who had an agreement to flexi-school two full days, but with the previous head teacher. P11 used home education websites to help her write a letter and appealed twice before it was permitted. If turned down, she would have asked heads of other schools. She intends to do the same when the baby is four.

12 (recruited via relative on Facebook- 3 phone interviews in Oct '16, March '17 and Nov '16) *Ex-social worker*	6, 4, 3 and 18 months	Eldest attended school for two years of primary. During the study she began home educating four year old and removed eldest from school despite the fact child was settled and happy there. P12's story is used as an example in Chapter 7.
13 (recruited via university colleague- 3 phone interviews in Oct '16, March '17 and Jan '18)	3 and 18 months (third child born during the data collection period)	Child attended Steiner kindergarten at the start (funded by nursery vouchers). She was considering home education during study but moved house to a state Steiner catchment area. P13's story is used as an example in Chapter 7.
14 (recruited via poster at nursery-1 interview in café in Sept '16 one by phone in March '17 and final email interview in Feb '18 as daughter was very ill) *Teacher*	3 and 9 months	Attended P1's alternative school nursery/ kindergarten at the start of the study. She was considering schools in the countryside, alternative schools, or home education until the age of seven. P14 intended to travel first but had to move to a city near a specialist hospital due to baby's serious illness and started home educating while they decided where to live and what to do next. Partner is also a primary school teacher. They both had problems with schools squashing creativity but did not want to teach at home in the traditional sense.
15 (recruited via relative on Facebook group -2 phone interviews Sept '16 and Nov '17)	7 and 4	Daughter was home educated and then flexi schooled (with gradually increasing time spent at school requested by child) and is now full time. P15 was considering withdrawing son to home educate but his happiness improved after anxiety and reluctance to go into school at the start of reception year (flexi for the first year until compulsory school age as new head teacher will not allow the same schedule his sister had).

After coding these transcripts, theoretical sampling led me to seek parents who had considered home education but decided against it. This would enable me to investigate factors that prevented or deterred them from making the decision. I also wished to find more who were still thinking about it or were about to start.

I placed posters with the project details on in shops, play areas, cafés and at the university. One response was from a Masters student in the Education Department who had seen my advert at the photocopier; another saw it in a newsagent's window. I found two participants through recommendations from staff at the University and one through a musician friend of mine. One passed me on to a friend who was about to start home education. These are considered examples of snowball sampling (Tracy, 2019).

Table 4.3: Participants recruited in third round

Participant number, interview details and job if education related	Age of child(ren) at first interview	Summary of situation and how resolved
16 (Recommended by P15-one phone interview)	4 and 6 months	Preparing to start home education and family have already adjusted work patterns (self-employed). Eldest was attending a Montessori nursery until compulsory school age but P16 did not see the point of paying for Montessori School (vouchers currently pay for 15 hours) and considered it to still be a type of school. She was not sure if baby will use nursery and cannot imagine either of them going to school (perhaps college to follow their interests). P16 broached the subject about not going down traditional education route with her husband when their son was 12- 18 months and he said he had been thinking the same sort of thing. She looked around locally and found a group of home educators and those considering it.
17 (Recruited via poster at my university-one phone interview) *Secondary school teacher on maternity leave studying for Education Masters*	3 and 8 months	Researched home education after feeling pressure from her community at her mosque that school would be harmful. P17 decided against it after a long period of deliberation. She helped at a tuition centre and saw children with unmet learning needs. P17 had fond memories of school and her family appreciated the opportunities it afforded. P17's story is used as an example in Chapter 7.
18 (Recruited via poster in newsagents shop-one face to	13 and 12	Researched home education before children were of compulsory school age and was willing to start but changed her mind upon moving from London

face interview in café) *Lecturer (ex-art teacher)*		to Northern Ireland and being unable to find politically like-minded parents. P18 also wanted to start doctorate and pursue her academic career. She found a school near her university with a mixed social demographic rather than being separated by gender and religion.
19 (Recruited via friend, coincidentally knew P15 from Montessori nursery- one phone interview)	9 and 5	Researched home education but failed to convince her husband so children are now in mainstream school. They previously attended a Montessori nursery. She found a group of parents who would have liked to teach each other's children or even set up their own school.

Theoretical sampling guides us toward those who can answer our research questions. We deliberately seek knowledgeable respondents (Rudestam and Newton, 2015) but are limited by those who are willing and available, this ultimately biases the sample. Those who responded to my advertisements are the ones who were happy to tell their story. I noticed that many of them had a connection to education, for example teachers, lecturers, and teaching assistants, not all were currently working but I identified them in the tables as I found it to be such a large proportion (7/21). There were also a few who had a relative or close friend who was a teacher or teaching assistant. P8 had retrained to teach forest school.

A surprising incident occurred whilst interviewing a participant (recruited via a friend of mine in another county); she stated that she had been introduced to the idea of home education whilst her daughter was at a Montessori nursery - by somebody else in my study (P15, who had been recruited via a Facebook group). The two participants were unconnected in my recruitment strategy. However, it highlighted the limited pools of people from which I could recruit, and that people considering home or alternative education move in overlapping communities.

The penultimate participant was a person whose child attends the primary school where my children used to go. I chatted to her about my course and she immediately said she had considered home education. Resisting the urge to describe my findings, I asked if I could interview her. At this stage I had developed my theory and was about to write the discussion and finish the return to the literature. I had previously intended to carry out member checking, but this participant gave me the ideal opportunity to see if my grounded theory made sense to somebody who had embarked on the journey. I discuss member checking later in this chapter.

Table 4.4: Participant recruited in fourth round

Participant number, interview details and job if education related	Age of child(ren) at first interview	Summary of situation and how resolved
20 (Mother from my children's ex primary school-one face to face interview at her home)	10	Researched home education but decided against it upon finding a mainstream nursery with forest school provision then speaking to an infant school head teacher who shared her concerns about SATs. The child was very happy and confident in her final year of primary school.

The flexible nature of Grounded Theory allows for data collection at any stage of the research process be this by observation, interview, or analysis of documentation. Theoretical sampling is designed to fill gaps in the theory or find cases to further illustrate categories. During the final stages of writing up this thesis, schools in the UK and across the world were forced to close. This meant that parents had to supervise their children at home therefore removing any barriers that would normally prevent home education. P21 began to journal her home schooling activities daily on Facebook and I immediately took an interest into how she facilitated her children's learning. I was aware that she had previously

considered home education but had not seen her in person for the duration of my doctoral studies. I interviewed her in my garden about three months into her home educating experience and presented my grounded theory back to her for comments.

Table 4.5: Participant recruited in fifth round

Participant number, interview details and job if education related	Age of child(ren) at first interview	Summary of situation and how resolved
21 (Friend on Facebook) Interviewed in my garden due to Covid restrictions *Special needs teacher*	12, 11 and 9 (adopted)	Researched home education but initially decided against it for financial reasons. Eldest son is in a special school and middle child was to start there soon for high school. P21 was forced to home educate due to Covid-19 pandemic and decided to continue to with youngest daughter as she was benefitting hugely. P21's story is used as an example in Chapter 7.

Interviewing

There are many aspects to consider when carrying out interviews. Firstly, the relationship between researcher and interviewee needs to be considered. I am aware that my identity as a researcher from a university could seem more intimidating to a participant compared to my identity as another parent or ex-teacher. Nunkoosing, (2005:7) writes that the researcher is not just an interviewer and that they belong 'to other identity-defining professional tribes'. Both during the interview and in it subsequent analysis, the participants and data are seen through a filter shaped by the experiences and knowledge of the researcher. King and Horrocks (2010) remind us that we not only bring our political agendas, caring roles, and professional selves but that we 'situationally *create* different selves in the field - being a member of a group, being a friend, being sympathetic' (2010:135

emphasis in original). This is something that I paid close attention to as I established a relationship with the participants for example by introducing myself as a parent and ex-teacher rather than simply a doctoral student. I also chose to wear casual clothes that reflected my personality rather than neutral business attire. There is always a power inequality though, as the subject must follow the direction the researcher takes with the questioning. Kvale (2007) describes this well: 'The craft consists in calibrating social distances without making the subject feel like an insect under the microscope' (2007:10). I believe that my reflective listening skills and empathic responses put the participants at ease. I purposefully kept the interviews short and asked them to recommend a time and place with which they would feel comfortable. Some chose a café instead of their home and I believe giving this element of control reduced the pressure on parents to tidy up their house or feel they may be subjected to judgements about its size/location. The initial interviews were unstructured, and I did not fire questions at them but allowed their story to unfold, guiding it at times or asking for more detail or clarification. King and Horrocks warn that the interview may be 'shallow and superficial if the interviewer is too deferential to the interviewee, or the participant may clam up if she feels the interviewer is too aggressive' (2010:1). I ensured that the interview felt conversational in style by paying attention to my phrasing of questions and avoiding the use of academic language.

The participant may also gain new insights into their situation or could feel anxious in the interview (Kvale, 2007). I have noticed that I feel nervous before interviews but soon relax. This is easier in face-to-face situations where there is the distraction of having a drink and some small talk first. I believe I have a warm, friendly manner and the interviews have always seemed a positive experience for the participants. One said I helped her focus her thoughts and explain things better to others. Another asked my opinion of home education;

in order to stay impartial, I stated that I had seen good examples of it, but I had also seen very good classroom environments and it very much depended on how both were done. I inadvertently followed Oakley's (1981) suggestions in that by answering their questions and offering support I was breaking down the researcher-participant hierarchy. She advises researchers to bring in personal roles where appropriate. It felt very natural to occasionally mention my children's experiences and my observations as a teacher.

 Kvale (2007) states that to gain an understanding of the participants' points of view, semi-structured life-world interviews can be used. Semi-structured interviews were used after the exploratory stage as I wished to focus on themes that had arisen such as how they accommodated work and whether they had considered alternative settings/other schools. Elaboration of some points may be requested or clarification of ambiguities. The researcher must have sensitivity and this is easier for some than others and may depend on the experience they have had in the field. We must not assume that we know the meaning behind the participants' words. In practice, this is done by acknowledging the participants' responses or asking for further detail where things are unclear. Occasionally, the researcher may feel that they have understood when they have actually misinterpreted the words.

Rorty (1979 cited in King and Horrocks, 2010) believed that knowledge is brought into being through conversation rather than being merely conveyed. However, even responding in writing to my questions may have caused participants to see their journey in a different light. For example, when P14, whose baby had been in hospital for six months during the study, responded to me by email. I felt awful asking her to continue in the study but she reassured me that writing had helped her to further explore how she felt about the situation. She wrote a long, well-structured piece and as I read it, I questioned whether

verbal answers would have been so in depth. She had clearly taken time to develop her answers and I was very grateful to her. One parent (P9) who decided to keep her child in school after flexi-schooling also responded with a short email, I still used this for my analysis but was aware that it had been written in a more rushed way.

Because of the logistical problems involved in meeting face to face, in many cases, I utilised phone interviews. In order to facilitate an open, non-intrusive atmosphere I always introduced the project and told participants a little about myself. Ward et al. (2015) conducted research on participants' opinions of telephone interviews as part of their larger Grounded Theory study on sleep masks for a medical condition. They found that the respondents were used to using the phone already e.g. at work, felt comfortable in their own environment, established rapport easily and did not feel their answers were judged. Some said they relaxed and divulged more information on the phone than they would have face to face. The researchers concluded that phone interviews were not a second-rate alternative to meeting in person. The absence of gestures means that the words and hesitations become the primary focus, all of Ward et al.'s participants chose to receive a telephone call instead of a meeting and some stated that they could concentrate better on the interview questions without being able to see the researcher. One participant stated that 'I think it just seems more like a conversation, more than an interview' (2015:2779). I do not feel the inability to see facial expressions hindered the collection of rich, meaningful data.

 The phone interviews lasted from 20 minutes to half an hour (which was less than half of the length of the other interviews). I decided to shorten the second round of interviews as I realised that a lot of the content of the first interviews, when meeting face to face,

concerned pleasantries such as making or buying a drink. These face-to-face interviews often tailed off into a friendly chat once the participant had told her story. The children were present at some and it proved quite difficult to stay on topic with them as a distraction. I did not feel an hour was appropriate for a telephone call and I suspected many would not respond to my adverts if they stated that amount of time was required. I found 20-30 minutes ample as, after a brief introduction, the rest was straight to the point.

Meeting somebody in person provides another dimension to the data because I cannot help but make judgements about the person's appearance. Some people express an element of their identity through their clothes, hair, tattoos, piercings etc. I am also aware that they may be making judgements about me. I used good levels of eye contact and smiling to put the participant at ease and form a social connection that facilitates the sharing of often very personal information.

MacLure (2003) uses terms such as imitations and forgeries when she discusses describing life histories, although I did not intend my interviews to be life histories, most participants divulged information from their childhood or about other aspects of their lives. MacLure (2003) reminds us that the interviewees wish to represent themselves in a certain way and may present an image that they believe will please the researcher or be of interest. Most of my interviews seem to have free-flowing prose but occasionally, the participants grapple for words and I have questioned whether it is because they do not want to use a derogatory term or sound harsh for instance when describing other people or their local school. I believe that the anonymity and facelessness of the phone interviews may have provided a very open space in which they could express their true opinions.

My questions began by being very open for example 'Tell me about yourself and your home education story' and 'so you're thinking about home or alternative education, can you tell me about what you're thinking?' The participants spent as long as they wished on each question. I intervened to further clarify points for example P12 told me a little about asking her Scottish local authority for permission, so I asked her to elaborate on that. Other early questions were 'have you started gathering evidence, looking at websites etc?' and 'when did you first have the idea or start to think about home education as a possibility?' Because each participant was at a different stage of their journey or was utilising different types of provision a fixed interview schedule was not appropriate. An example of this was in the interview with P7 who, upon mentioning her experience of traveller sites, inspired me to ask some questions spontaneously. This could not have been pre-planned. I asked 'when you mentioned the word 'system', is this a word that the traveller community might use?' and inquired as to whether somebody sending their child to school might be considered different if the rest of the community was home educating. P7 was the only participant who spoke about an LA inspector visiting her home. This naturally came up in the conversation.

Once themes had arisen from the analyses of interviews that had been undertaken, I focussed the questions e.g. 'How do family and friends respond when you talk about home education?' I also tailored the questions to the participants' situation.

I transcribed all the recordings verbatim and, after physically adding codes to paper copies of the exploratory interviews, I uploaded them into NVivo for coding, all subsequent interviews were coded in NVivo as soon as was practical. To record my personal thoughts and musings I wrote memos (both digitally and on paper) after each interview. Drawing diagrams also helped in the formation of categories and connections.

Transcription of interviews may seem a straightforward process but 'transcripts are artefacts and we should acknowledge that we researchers produce, rather than retrieve them shell-like from the sea bed' (Alldred and Gillies, 2002:161). We may state that transcription is verbatim, but does that mean noting every verbal gesture, laugh and cough? There were interruptions from children in some of the home, café and phone interviews I carried out which meant the participants' trains of thought were broken. I elected to ignore recording the lengths of pauses but did record when a distraction occurred. For example, having to ring on a different phone line, or being cut off when a train went through a tunnel.

Ethical considerations

All participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form and told they could withdraw at any time without giving a reason (for forms see appendix). The participants agreed for me to audio record the interviews and I reassured them that, should they became upset, I would pause the recording and check if they wished to continue. Ethical approval was sought via standard university procedures. Participants were assured of anonymity and at a later date I decided to number rather than name them. I also decided not to describe any of the settings mentioned in detail as this would reveal their identity. Pseudonyms were not chosen for settings or participants as I decided that there were too many factors to consider with allocating them. My participants came from a wide range of nationalities and ethnic backgrounds and I did not feel it was my place to choose an alternative. Rosie O'Driscoll (2016) expressed similar feelings about allocating pseudonyms; in that names are identity markers that have specific meanings for participants 'I would have found it difficult to appropriate their actual names and (mis)appropriate them with another name' (O'Driscoll 2016:77).

For the exploratory interviews, I advertised for volunteers at the part-time alternative setting and had the privilege of being invited into some of the participants' houses. Whilst there, I also offered to show them how to use a learning platform the setting had developed and the parents seemed very happy to speak to me, I did not feel at any point that they were under obligation to be interviewed. The participation sheets and consent forms were discussed before we began. The experience of being welcomed into someone's home is interesting from a research perspective. In the UK, we have traditions such as offering a drink and showing the person the downstairs rooms. I did not write anything about the type of house or person, but it was impossible not to make judgements about the financial status of the person and the type of environment in which the child/children were being home educated. I pictured the reverse situation and imagined myself frantically tidying up before the visitor arrived. The three mothers I interviewed in the home (plus a later addition from the nursery adjoining the alternative setting) seemed very friendly and open, perhaps because they knew I had become a regular visitor and their children knew me. Duncombe and Jessop (2002) use a very thought- provoking title for their chapter: 'Doing Rapport' and the Ethics of 'Faking Friendship'; in it, they explore whether it is unethical to be too friendly with participants. The authors reflect that in their ethnographic feminist research, it led to disclosure of information from women that would not have been possible in a more formal interview with less rapport and empathy. The fact that researchers develop these skills and employ them on unsuspecting participants could be seen as a manipulation where more personal information is revealed than was intended because of the 'fake friendship'.

Three of the participants were interviewed in café (one was via a colleague at my university but she was unknown to me and from another building). These meetings gave me plenty of time to introduce myself and also allowed me to see facial expressions. I also had a sense of

their age, although it is often not easy to judge this from sight alone. For the university colleague, I was able to see her workplace and read her research. These encounters, being more informal, blurred the boundary of researcher and friend. Kvale (1992:149) writes that this close relationship may lead to a 'quasi-therapeutic interview'. I felt that one of my longitudinal case study participants, P12, used her chats with me to strengthen her beliefs and she told me that it had helped her feel more confident in explaining her position to friends and family. Research that involves someone listening to stories about your life and your emotional experiences can generate positive feelings for the interviewee, especially in my research if a parent is feeling isolated or lonely. Conversely, if they are recalling difficult times in their lives then it may be traumatic for them. Duncombe and Jessop (2002) used their training in rapport to enable a man who did not want to talk about his marriage breakdown to end up recalling something from 20 years earlier and crying during the interview. It was a conscious decision for me not to probe into the school days of my participants but to allow this to come up naturally. Those that mentioned it usually had strong feelings but I did not want to come across as having the assumption that the schools they had encountered in the past were the reason for their decision.

Fensham-Smith (2017) described incidents that happened as she entered the homes for example, a near miss where she had to console a mother whose child was almost hit by a truck, interacting with kittens, and being roped into helping unpack a supermarket delivery. She too felt that these occurrences interrupted the interview, and she questioned her role as a researcher in their home. She felt particularly conflicted when one parent disclosed personal information and then wished to carry on showing things her child had worked on and made. The researcher had time constraints due to train times, but the parent wanted to carry on the conversation for longer; this example demonstrates how easy it is to cross the

boundary between researcher and friend. I was clear in setting a time limit in all of my interviews.

An issue of confidentiality arose as participants mentioned other home educators in their interview. One parent had passed my details to a friend and it turned out she knew another that was unconnected in my recruitment process. This raised concerns about anonymity as she wished to talk about her friend's experience. The fact this person had been introduced to home education through my other participant was important, but I steered the conversation away stating that we could not talk about their story.

The later telephone interviews had a slightly more formal feeling and were less like an open, flowing conversation than the face-to-face interviews. This may because I only gave a quick introduction of my background as a teacher and parent. I described my study's focus and explained how I came to be researching the journey to becoming a home educator (via my work at the alternative setting). I occasionally added statements of agreement or understanding to show I was listening. To develop rapport, I sometimes added a little comment about my own children. I believe this helped relax them and show empathy. I was, however, very aware of taking up their time which was not the case in the home or café interviews. For example, one of the participants asked me to ring while she was on the train home from work and we had to cut the conversation off when she almost missed her stop. Others asked me to ring after their children had gone to bed. I could hear one being asked questions by her daughter while we were on the phone.

None of those interviewed decided to withdraw but one did not want a second interview as her circumstances had changed and she explained by email that her child was going to attend school full time. With her permission, I used the email as part of my dataset.

Data Analysis

In Chapter 3, I outlined the stages of analysing data in constructivist Grounded Theory, I now explain how I implemented those processes.

Open coding

After the first four exploratory interviews, I formed some codes that were prematurely too focussed e.g. looking for signs of feelings such as anxiety. Upon attending a full day course on Grounded Theory in London and coding real data in the workshop, I came to understand the importance of line-by-line coding. Summarising the key details from each line ensures that the line is scrutinised and the researcher has not jumped to conclusions based on pre-conceived ideas. I re-coded line-by-line. I then uploaded the transcripts and line-by-line into NVivo and used focussed coding methods. All subsequent interviews were coded in NVivo immediately after transcription.

Example of line-by-line coding of P10's interview transcript

Transcript	Codes
I Was very briefly a primary teacher I did a PGCE and first year, started my second year but decided it wasn't for me really. So I've Had an insight into the school system After that worked in after school clubs and holiday clubs. Background of working with school children really	Was a teacher Left profession Insight into system Worked in holiday clubs etc
We had (son) and when he was 4-5 months old when I started to think I wasn't very keen on sending him to school And also I've got a best friend who home educated her child was the age I was teaching 6 or 7 years old. I thought she was a bit mad, things like the fact her eldest couldn't read and wasn't interested in reading. Teaching year 2 that's a really big thing so I came to a place where I thought home ed was just a bit mad , and a bit nuts and odd really	Thinking of it since he was a baby Best friend home edded Thought she was mad Her child couldn't read Thought home ed mad!
When I had (son) something just didn't feel quite right, I brought it up with my husband but he wasn't really too keen I'd say I think he thought I was a bit mad as well. As he got older I don't know how I persuaded him but I seemed to persuade him	Didn't feel right Husband wasn't keen Persuaded him somehow
Things like having to sit quietly and only put their hand up to talk when it was convenient for me as the teacher and a lot of what we did every day was just behaviour management. If a child asks a question but you don't have time to answer it right then. I didn't think that was fair on them either I feel like they should be given all the opportunities and answers they need at that time coz being young they forget things quite quickly and you don't always go back to it.	Shouldn't have to sit quietly Behaviour management No time to answer questions Forget things when young
Me: What sort or research did you carry out? A little bit from my friend. I think the hardest thing is getting to grips with that they will learn at their own pace and you don't have to push them just like they learn to talk and walk on their own they will learn things when they're interested in it. Research into other countries others in the EU that don't go to school till later and just children being children	Research from friend Learn at own pace Like talking or walking Other countries. Children being children

Focused Coding

Once initial codes started to occur frequently in the data, I arranged them into larger

groups.   This is something that I wanted to do manually in order to become more familiar

with the data. I cut out my initial codes and shuffled them around on my rug until I formed

broad themes.

Figure 4.1a Manual sorting of initial codes

Figure 4.1b Manual sorting of initial codes

Figure 4.1c Manual sorting of initial codes
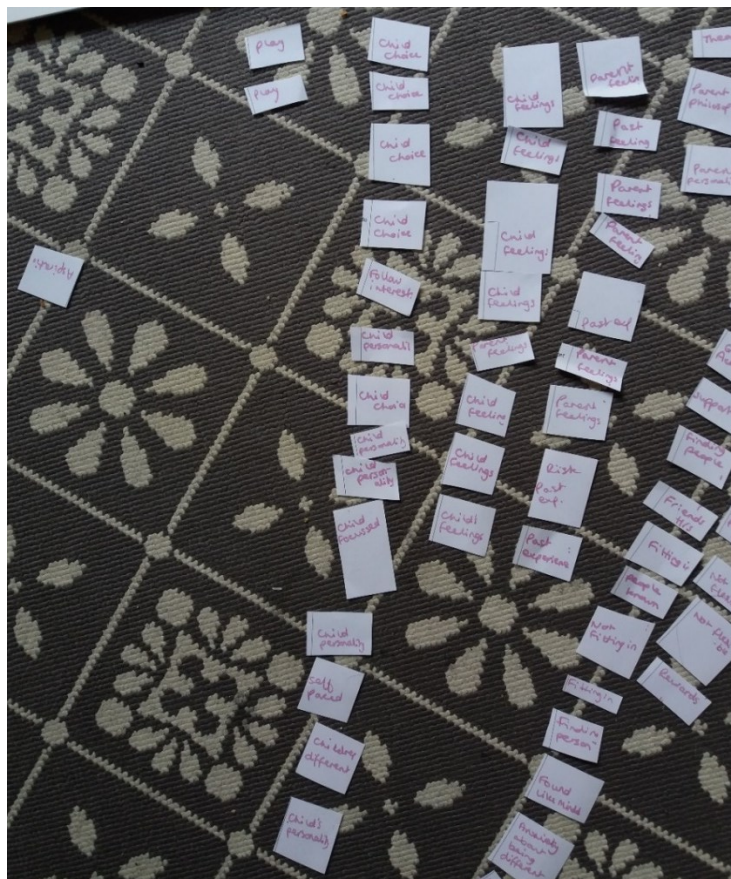
Some of the groups contained more codes than others (For example, in the final dataset 12 of the participants used the word 'system' and all mentioned considering alternative educational settings, with some expressing it being prohibitively expensive). Being a qualitative researcher means quantifying the data is often viewed as unnecessary. However, seeing which codes dominate really only be done by counting (Carmichael and Cunningham, 2017).

I noted that some words were repeated in the data, and others were very similar so placed them together. I have written examples of those in brackets. The early codes in descending order of frequency were:

Fitting in (socialisation, support, people like us, being different)
Child's personality and interests (child focussed, child choice)
Formality/structure (rewards, inflexible)
Work/life (logistics, practicalities)
Child's feelings
Parents' feelings and past experiences
Alternatives
The system (state, regime, control, criticism of government)
Research
Learning (falling behind, academic priorities)
Natural (natural parenting)
Play

Table 4.6: Early codes

In the next round of interviews, I noticed very similar themes and the coding process became quicker. I used focussed codes rather than having to line-by-line code every transcript. For coding later interviews, I used NVivo (the software uses the term 'nodes' rather than codes). I created nodes by highlighting segments of the data; digitally grouping them makes it very easy to compare similar types of statements. Nodes were grouped into tentative categories and similar nodes merged. For example, after my first round of interviews, I identified the process of information gathering and soon noticed that it was having an influence on the participants' opinions and feelings.

It is not possible for me to screenshot a transcript with the focussed codes from NVivo (as the software saves examples from each node in a separate area) so below, is an extract from the email response of P14 with focussed codes added to the document retrospectively.

Most of my research lately has been just thinking and mulling things over, as I had already had a good look at alternative options before (e.g. searching for full time forest schools to no avail, self directed kindergartens etc) and found nothing that I liked (in terms of a school) anywhere near anywhere we could realistically live.	Research (internal) Alternatives Location/practicalities
The idea I am most settled on is unschooling (though I don't really like the name of it, maybe life learning is a bit more accurate though that term also makes me cringe a bit!)	Learning (informal)
I don't know anyone who does not send their children to the nearest school. I think most people I explain my thinking to maybe agree (to some, at least) in principle but would not feel strongly enough to change from the accepted path.	Others Feelings/Strength of belief
I have never gone on a conventional path because it's conventional (although some of my choices might be 'conventional' e.g. we own a house, have two children...). But what I am trying to say I suppose is that my research in a way is how I have lived my life already.	Alternative 'path' Feelings/past experiences

Theoretical sampling

It had occurred to me early in my course that stating the methods at the start and then sticking to them could lead to missing opportunities to explore interesting facets of the setting. In Grounded Theory studies further data can be gathered as themes arise and negative cases can be focussed on to further qualify a theory. The researcher interacts with the data and documents the new categories and labels.

Theoretical sampling enables interview questions to be adapted immediately in response to findings. This could even occur mid-interview although it is more likely that it will be in subsequent interviews. For example, upon hearing that some partners were supportive while others needed convincing of the benefits of home education, I began asking this as a question. Once the category of practicalities had been pinpointed in the exploratory interviews, I began to ask about work and changes to lifestyle. The idea of obstacles getting in the way led me to question why some parents decide against home education having thoroughly researched it. This was difficult to specifically recruit for but I was also following the journey of five participants who were not fully decided (one had previously home educated and was deciding whether her second child would remain in reception, another decided to flexi-school but was seeing how it went).

Memoing

Memoing is a term given to any sort of note taking during the research study. I often wrote memos straight after an interview to record interesting observations. During coding, I would also memo if a new insight or category was starting to form.

Memo from 16/12/16

P13's opinions have been formed from seeing the changes in her nieces and nephews, she also mentioned that school affected her love of learning.

She is making the most of being able to use childcare vouchers at a part time Steiner kindergarten and has the support of her husband and mother in law. Is delaying telling her own family though.

Memo from 16/11/17

Discussing home ed with P15 normalised P19. She felt validated. She was used to people thinking she was an 'oddball'. She was excited.

Once I began reading literature about my early themes, memoing helped me form connections between my data and other researchers' findings. Reading unrelated papers and attending conferences and seminars also led to some 'lightbulb' moments that I recorded in memos. For example, I was flicking through a notebook I had used at a conference in Sheffield. I attended presentations on topics that were not directly relevant but seemed interesting, as there were no others from my field of enquiry. Links began to form between two of the presentations; Horton and Kraftl's "Rats, waste and 'racist groundwater': On Socio-materialities, childhoods and extra-sectional identities" and Walker's 'Complementarities of technology, nature and environmental concern in contemporary global childhoods'. I started to write a memo about parents wanting the perfect environment for their child. Kraftl's talk centred on a play area that lay unused because it was often littered with dog muck. Flashes of my data that highlighted this concept started to enter my mind such as outdoor picnics in all weather, risky play that was

also safe. As another example, I also considered the welcoming, nurturing décor used in Steiner schools and the frequently stated desire for a school to have an outdoor area. Memoing about environment led to ideas about the concept of nostalgia and affect in memories connected to places.

NVivo is especially useful for memoing, as the memos can be linked to the data source that triggered their creation, dated, and even coded. I also wrote many memos in notebooks immediately after an interview or whilst in other situations that inspired me; these were copied into NVivo at a later date as paper notes are difficult to go back to during analysis. I could split or merge digital memos and often created links between them. Hutchinson et al.(2010) documented their use of Grounded Theory and NVivo in a methodology paper. They labelled types of memo for example, research diary, reflective, conceptual, emergent questions, explanatory and literature related.   Memoing can be done to record thoughts and plans in NVivo before any data is collected. Policy documents and newspaper articles can be imported as well as video, audio, and text files. Importing literature notes as memos means that they can easily be coded (Bringer et al., 2006). The iterative nature of the analysis means that organisation of thoughts during the development of codes and categories is crucial. I do not feel that it automates the process in any way, the researcher is still in control of which links to create and can colour code or draw diagrams manually using the software.

Constant Comparative Analysis

Glaser and Strauss recommend analysing data as soon as it is collected. Each time a code is added to a piece of data, the incident is compared with others in the same category. They add that this can be from memory and there is no need to refer to actual notes (Glaser and

Strauss, 1967). Over a five-year doctorate, I would not ever want to rely on memory, however, with software such as NVivo, it is easy to see the dimensions of a category as they can be grouped together on the same screen. By comparing the incidents and statements and what conditions influenced them, a theory can start to develop. As ideas pop into one's mind one must 'Stop coding and record a memo on your ideas' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967:107). The data stays fresh as one goes back and forth looking for other examples and an intimate knowledge of the data develops. Urquhart's (2013) writing conveys the excitement she feels as she becomes so close to her data; I too have felt this, and during the study, I never tired of seeing my participants' responses.

Category construction

The codes that seem to be the most significant or dominant formed the basis for my categories. Some codes grouped together quite easily whereas for others the decision took much longer. Bryant states, 'As the researcher categorizes, he or she raises the conceptual level of the analysis from description to a more abstract, theoretical level' (Bryant, 2017:225). Placing items in categories is not always a simple task. History shows us many examples of changes in classification systems in light of new knowledge or an alternative perspective. In my lifetime, taxonomy in biology has moved from visual methods to DNA comparison. Gender, race, and class are other labels that do not always have clear boundaries. During my analysis, I elevated some of the focussed codes to categories and others became subcategories as they related to the wider theme.

Early on in the analysis, I noticed that some of the codes described participants' opinions and feelings. These could be considered as internal aspects that the candidates could change. Others were external variables that were fixed (or more difficult for the

participants to change). The concept of computer software and hardware came to mind with 'software' incorporating codes related to the participants' thoughts and feelings and 'hardware' being about external conditions and practicalities. I noted that information gathering had links with all of the other codes I was generating. I renamed the focussed codes as gerunds, so they described processes and actions.

Coding with gerunds enables description of the participants' actions. This is sometimes termed 'process coding' (Saldaña, 2011). For example, the focussed code of research became information gathering. Later I realised that the participants were seeking information in a variety of ways. Formally, informally and by responding to how they felt about the information and settings. In the table below, I present an early version of my theorising. By visually grouping under the headings, I was attempting to form relationships between the categories.

Software (thoughts and feelings)	Hardware (Practicalities)
Expressing feelings	Finding/using home education groups
Forming opinions of school	Receiving support
Hearing opinions of others	Finding/setting up alternatives
Parenting their way	Working
Learning without teachers	
Evading the system	
Labelling types of people	
Information gathering	

Table 4.7: Exploring early categories
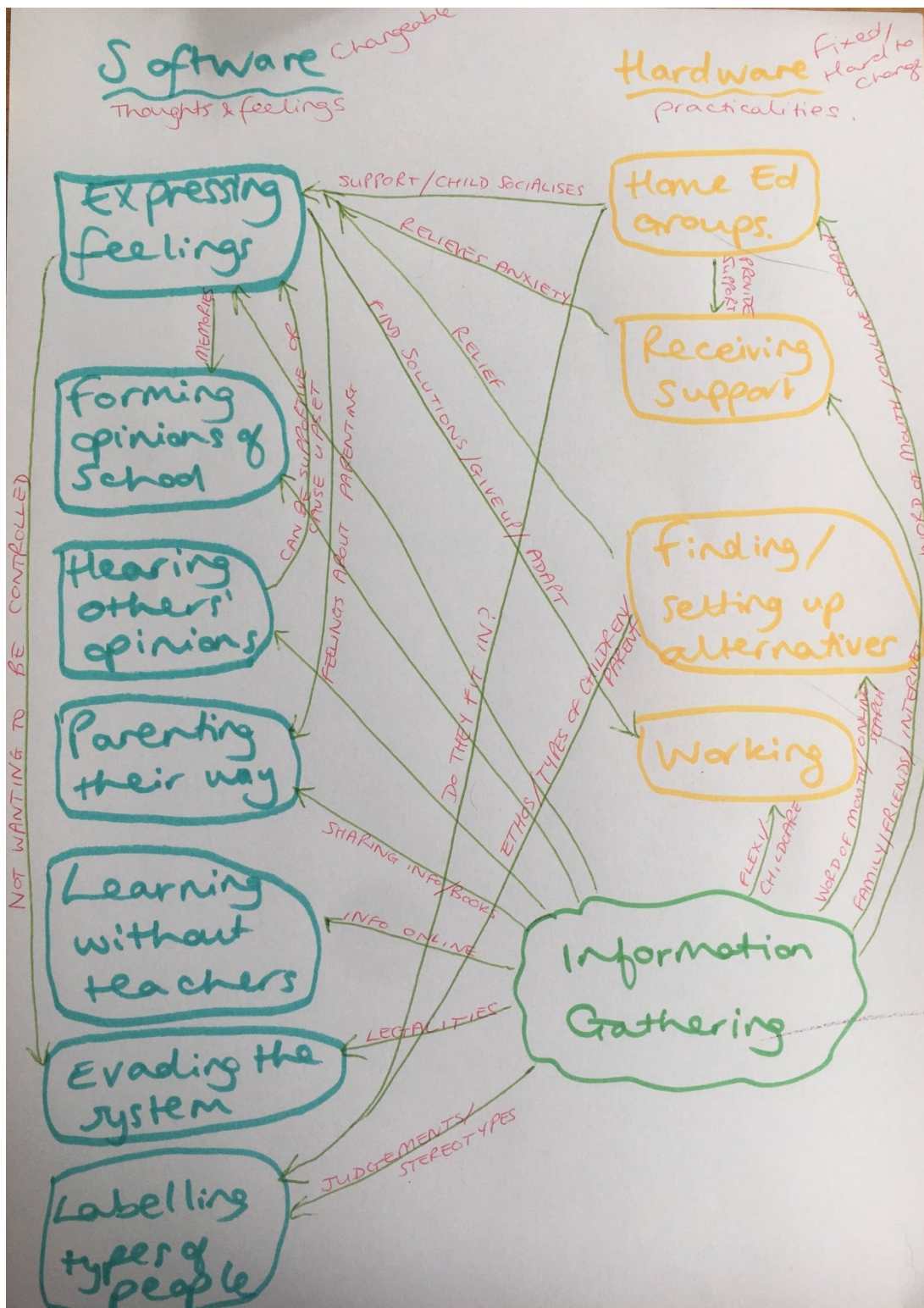
Figure 4.2: Exploring links between codes and categories

Diagramming enabled me to explore the links between the focussed codes and early

categories. Manually drawing links enabled me to see the data in a different light and

sensitised me to the codes. In becoming more familiar with the codes and relationships, I felt the next stages of interviewing and coding occurred more naturally and was therefore faster.

Fixing of categories does not happen until much later in the Grounded Theory process. I used constant comparative analysis throughout to re-examine data. When new codes are constructed and higher-level concepts have been determined, the data is reconsidered and may reveal new insights. As part of my theoretical sampling, I interviewed different types of alternative educators and those undecided about it. During that process, I realised that it was possible to trace the stages of the journey in real time. I reflected that, perhaps the development of some opinions had occurred before they embarked on the information gathering stage. I contemplated other terms to describe this observation more clearly.

Words that came to mind were attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and views. I found attitudes to be a more appropriate term as it is affect-laden so incorporates both the opinion and the sentiment behind it. According to the Oxford dictionary definition, it means a settled way of thinking or feeling about something (definitions of attitudes are explored in more detail in Chapter 6).

I discarded the terms developing and expressing attitudes because 'developing' implies their attitudes are forming; yet the participants in this study already hold them. 'Expressing' suggests that they are communicating them to others; however, they may not be, and some may have been keeping their attitudes private. I then questioned 'do you hold an attitude like you hold an opinion?' I would say no, it is inherent in you and takes more effort to change than an opinion. Attitude gives a direction toward or away from something. The

term I chose for this category is **attitudinal direction**. I present literature on attitudes in Chapter 6.

I then considered the provisional category title of information gathering. It seemed too stark and formal. The journey they were on was exciting and a little scary. I thought about terms related to this such as adventure, quest, expedition, excursion, exploration, and passage. This made me realise that the parents were travelling without a roadmap or guidebook. They were seeking advice from others and looking to see what was available around them and more distantly. I decided upon the term **surveying the landscape.**

Information gathering includes examining personal experiences from the past. This is likely to be affect-laden, especially when recalling negative events. Newer information may not be as persuasive unless it is very emotive for example some YouTube videos and books. Another powerful influence tends to be from a perceived reliable source such as a teacher complaining about class sizes and testing. Most purposeful information gathering is to justify already held beliefs and find validation or evidence to defend their point of view to others.

Some of the practicalities can be incorporated into the **surveying the landscape** category, for example, home education groups. Others are more of an impediment, so I chose the term **negotiating obstacles.** The parents are finding solutions to their concerns, and this may involve a compromise or significant change to their lifestyle. They express relief upon achieving a resolution.

The core category (or core process) **Stepping out of the System**, was a concept that once identified, I felt was an undercurrent present in all of the interviews. I had become sensitised to the fact that the parents either were working their way up to making the leap

or, had already taken the step.   The other three categories were components of the decision-making process leading up to the core category. The question mark was added to **Stepping out of the System?** as I identified participants who were utilising some aspects of mainstream provision or held concerns that their child would need to re-enter at some point in the future. As the analysis was nearing the end, I constructed a final category entitled **tunnelling between**. This is a subsidiary category as it is not part of the decision-making journey but occurs after the parent has chosen how to educate their child.

Constructing the grounded theory

I am imagining participants' attitudes setting the direction of their journey. Like compass bearings. Some feel a repulsion from schools or have an affinity toward natural parenting. Along the way, they are looking for reassurance and hear opinions of others. They have already gained much from their experience, so the course has most likely been set. Obstacles such as negative partner opinion, family situation etc. may be too difficult to overcome. Other practical problems seem to be easier to solve by **surveying the landscape** for example, by finding alternatives and/or support groups, moving to a new house or changing their job. For those who flexi-school, exposure to their attitude object (school) seems to soften their strong feelings. It is still not an affinity, but it is an acceptance. The child being happy is another source of information in these cases.

The three categories do not have distinct boundaries and there are many interactions between them. For example, it is not always clear where **attitudinal direction** ends and **surveying the landscape** begins. Some participants recall a moment when they first saw home education as a possibility; others describe it as a more gradual realisation.

The dominant focussed codes became subcategories. In Chapter 5, I explore each of them and use the participants' voices to provide examples. For some of the categories there are many similarities in their opinions and experiences, others have a broad range along a spectrum.

Theoretical coding

Once the grounded theory had started to form in my mind, I returned to the data in NVivo to see if I could fill the newly formed categories and subcategories with examples from the data. I had already done this to some extent as a result of the constant comparison technique mentioned earlier. I was now coding using the terms I had chosen for my grounded theory categories/subcategories. I either merged or discarded the less frequent codes at this stage.

To establish links between my categories I used diagramming and this helped me explore influences and interactions between them. For example, gathering information can lead to the discovery of practical solutions such as alternative education. Finding this provision or support can lead to changes in feelings and opinions. I describe the relationships in more detail in Chapter 5.

Member checking

At the start of my study, I intended to take Charmaz's (2006) advice to member check by presenting my theory back to a selection of the participants. Due to the time delay in analysing and constructing my theory as well as debating what I would do with their comments, I had put the idea to one side. I was unsure how much of my work to share with them and how much time I would need them to spend reading and commenting on it.

Serendipity thankfully intervened to resolve my conflict. Travelling to university for a student conference, I started to explain my research topic to somebody I rarely see (her daughter goes to the school my children used to attend). She told me she had considered home education and I immediately asked to interview her. Resisting the urge to describe my main findings, we carried on chatting about other things, and I met her the next week. At this point, I had already constructed my theory and was writing the discussion and beginning to integrate other theories. I asked her to verify my theory and see if she could relate to the stages of the journey. After a ten-minute open conversation with a couple of probing questions, I described my vision of a landscape with grooves and the concepts of **attitudinal direction**, **surveying the landscape** and **negotiating obstacles**. For each, I linked back to what she had just mentioned and added a few examples of other participants who had different types of experiences. She agreed that it made sense to her. Buchbinder (2011) highlights that, due to the power dynamic between the participant and the respondent, disagreement may not occur. To avoid this happening, I explained that it was important to say if she believed my theory to be unrepresentative of her experiences and that I was very interested in her interpretation. As I knew her, I believed she would express any variation or deviation without worrying she would offend me.

P20's **attitudinal direction** was not anti-school, but she had a Dutch friend who was stunned that in the UK, children go to school at the age of 4. She was unhappy with testing and had heard about children being taught just to pass tests. She believed that teachers were also unhappy with this policy. She did not mention parenting style, but I probed about that at the end of the interview. She did not follow any particular style but was annoyed by people who let their child's sleep routine interfere with their day. **Surveying the landscape** for her meant finding a state nursery that incorporated forest school. She valued the nursery's

focus on the happiness and development of the child rather than whether they could count etc. She researched home education thoroughly and found that the town had many active groups and an advisor at the LA. The main **obstacles** to negotiate were financial and that she had concerns about being able to teach all subjects to GCSE. She would have given up her job or reduced her hours if the need arose. Having decided not to **step out of the system**, there was some reticence on the mother's part when the child started school, but this was overcome when her daughter came out of school happy. However, the mother kept a close eye on her and was willing to withdraw her if any problems materialised. She was pleased with the way the school and its teachers handled the year 2 SATs and believed the children were unaware of what was happening to them. The head teacher had reassured her of this at an open day. P20 had the support of her husband either way but felt no need to discuss home education with her parents.

After successfully presenting my grounded theory to P20, I decided to do the same with P21. This interview took place at the very end of my doctoral research, after I had submitted a first draft of this thesis to my Director of Studies. The final participant was a person I knew who had been considering home education and was forced to upon the closure of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic in late March 2020, after seeing the benefits, she decided to continue to home educate her youngest child for the next academic year. Upon asking if my grounded theory made sense to her she remarked 'absolutely!' I return to her story as a vignette in Chapter 7.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the stages of my research study, and how I employed the principles of Grounded Theory throughout. As I was in the alternative setting for another

project before starting my doctoral research, I was able to develop a friendly relationship with the initial participants and was invited into some of their homes. The project began without a specific research question. Exploratory interviews with parents who home educated in addition to utilising an alternative learning environment led to the focus becoming the decision-making journey. I then carried out theoretical sampling in order to recruit participants who could help me to identify important factors influencing their choices. I explained how themes and eventually categories formed and how I named the subsequent subcategories. Part of the Grounded Theory process is exploring relationships between the categories and how they influence each other. I used diagramming to facilitate this stage and produced models to explore the dimensions of some of the categories. I present and explain these in the next chapter.

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to construct a grounded theory on the process of becoming a home or alternative educator. In this chapter, I present the main findings and situate them within the key debates in the fields of home and alternative education and educational decision-making. My study offers a unique perspective, as I was able to follow the journey of some parents who were not sure whether to home educate. Because of the flexibility of Grounded Theory as a methodology, I was also able to recruit participants utilising various types of alternative education and even those who had changed their mind. The participants showed great variation in family circumstances, education, employment, and beliefs. Some held strong opinions about school and learning from a young age, whereas others were influenced as adults (for example by the press and people they encountered). Although the decision-making process involves a multifaceted interplay of variables, the prominent themes were present throughout the interviews. In this chapter's sub-sections, I examine the grounded theory's categories in detail in light of the literature, some of which I presented in Chapters 2 and 5.

 I endeavour to answer the following emergent research questions:

1. What are parents' motivations for investigating the possibility of home/alternative education?

2. How and why do potential home/alternative educators gather information about alternatives to mainstream education?

3. What barriers do parents face in implementing their choice and how do they overcome them?

As described in Chapter 4, I constructed the grounded theory **Stepping out of the System?** from three main categories, each of which has three subcategories. **Attitudinal direction** encompasses **holding opinions of school**, **parenting style** and **learning without teachers**. **Surveying the landscape** includes hearing the **opinions of others**, **formally researching** and **following feelings**. **Negotiating obstacles** is composed of **accommodating work**, **relocating the family** and **receiving support**.

The aim at the start was to identify the factors affecting the process of becoming a home or alternative educator, the focus being parents' motivations, concerns, and problems. The participants spoke about significant aspects of their lives for as long as they wished thanks to the open nature of the questions. Conversely, they were free to move on quickly from areas they did not find as meaningful.

After introducing the core category/process, I show how I constructed it from the three main categories **attitudinal direction, surveying the landscape** and **negotiating obstacles.** I further divided each of these into three subcategories.

Stepping out of the System?

The core category of this grounded theory is entitled **Stepping out of the System?** This term describes the leap that home educators make in refusing to accept the default position of sending children to school. The term evokes images of jumping to escape confinement or avoiding being stuck in a deep groove. Not accepting a social norm is usually the result of a perceived risk e.g. harm to the child, or the belief that there is a benefit to be gained from the alternative e.g. personality development or happiness.

The early code of evading the system inspired the title of the core category as over half of the participants mentioned the word system or institution. For example, P6 stated: '*I don't want her to be in the system, which is very formalised; in particular in this country*'. She acknowledged that her distaste of 'the system' came from growing up in the Soviet Union but she had never visited a UK school. P1 spoke of it being almost like a *'regime'*. She, too, was educated in another country before moving to Britain. P16 also used the word '*system*'. She referred to it as an institution: '*I suppose the reasoning behind it was just that I didn't really see the school system as an amazing institution and the institutionalisation of it*'.

Some of the participants had recent experience of British schools. For example P9, who kept her daughter at home one day a week in reception year; ultimately, she ended up attending school full time but P9 still held the opinion that: '*The further entrenched we get in the schooling system the more I want to move away from it*'. P10 completed one year of teaching after her training, also helping in holiday and after-school clubs. She believed she '*had an insight into the school system*' that played a part in her decision to fully home educate. P21 had the most experience of mainstream schooling and stated of her children that '*they never really have fitted into the system at all, and they've never really got the care that I would like them to have really'*. She fought for her eldest two sons to be able to attend special schools. Despite the eldest being seven years behind academically and her sons both being unable to cope emotionally with the stress associated with being in school, had it not been for her insistence they would have remained in mainstream provision. A lack of confidence that the government was doing the best they could for children is prevalent in the data, as is the opinion that teachers are not to blame as they have so many children in each class. P14 held a similar view. She was a qualified teacher and her partner

taught in a primary school. She stated '*Neither of us feel like our hearts are in the system; it just doesn't put children or what children need at the top of the agenda*'.

'The system' is talked about in terms of controlling the participants with regard to getting the children to attend at a certain time and only being able to take holidays or go travelling when the state allows. P3 and P4's daughter was suffering anxiety, so they sometimes arrived late; they felt that the school was unsympathetic. P4 stated '*We became more disgruntled with the system, and being in the system*'.

P7, a single mother who had experience of growing up on traveller sites, stated that traveller culture was '*a different system or being out of the system*'. P7 herself attended mainstream school but was taken out of school at the end of her primary years due to racist bullying. She achieved success once back in mainstream education and at the time of her interview was studying for a master's degree in psychology. She was also of the opinion that education was a 'tool' and that the system is there if you want to use it; for example, she was happy to dip in and out of the curriculum and use it as a guideline. Interestingly, she was the only participant to mention having contacted the local authority about her choice and had invited the LA inspector into her home. Her recollection of the visit was that:

> *He was really nice. You can send them a report or they can visit you, more to give advice really, he could see that she's really sociable. I was told to show him what you're doing with them but he didn't even look at it.*

The environment the participants experienced growing up in and-in some cases-their university courses have influenced their opinions. A large proportion of the participants were qualified teachers or had studied psychology/sociology. P1 referred to Foucault's idea

of 'bio-power' in schools (learnt when she was studying for her Doctorate) and P4 (currently studying artificial intelligence) likened the fact that teachers have changed the word 'work' to 'learning' in school being like 'Orwellian doublespeak'.

There are many definitions of what a system is; with disciplines such as science, business and information technology all having their own, very specific meanings. A general definition from the Cambridge Dictionary is that it is a particular set of actions for doing something. In Britain there exists a health care system, immigration system and, of course an education system. The participants in this study are not talking about **a** system however, they are referring to **the** system. I feel their interpretation is closer to that stated on Merriam-Webster.com 'a powerful government or social organization that controls people's lives'. This definition aligns with the early in-vivo codes of regime, institution and control I referred to in Chapter 4 and echoes the use of the term by unschooling bloggers researched by O'Hare and Coyne (2019). 'The system' is a term utilised in popular culture for instance the name of a band, film and non-fiction book 'The system: Who rigged it, how we fix it by Robert B. Reich. In her book chapter entitled 'Imagining Otherwise' or 'Tinkering with the System?' Hughes employs the term in a similar way to in the present study. Her doctoral study participants were given paper and asked to design any type of school that they wanted. She found that teenagers who only had experience of traditional schooling were unimaginative in the changes they would make; hence 'tinkering'. A teacher trained in democratic education, on the other hand, suggested radical approaches such as time to continue projects and involvement with staff other than teachers for example in the kitchen and garden (Hughes, 2015).

This section provides some answers to research question 1: What are parents' motivations for investigating the possibility of home/alternative education? However, as I explained in Chapter 4, the core process of **Stepping out of the System?** comprises three major categories. These are the aspects of the decision-making process I deemed to be the most significant. For each of these categories, I will now discuss the range and dimensions of their properties.

Category 1 - Attitudinal direction

This category includes three subcategories: **holding opinions of school, learning without teachers** and **parenting style.** This **is** primarily about the opinions and feelings formed during the participants' lives before the possibility of home education arose. For those parents whose child started mainstream school at some point, that experience has also affected their attitudes. This section provides more answers to research question What are parents' motivations for investigating the possibility of home/alternative education?
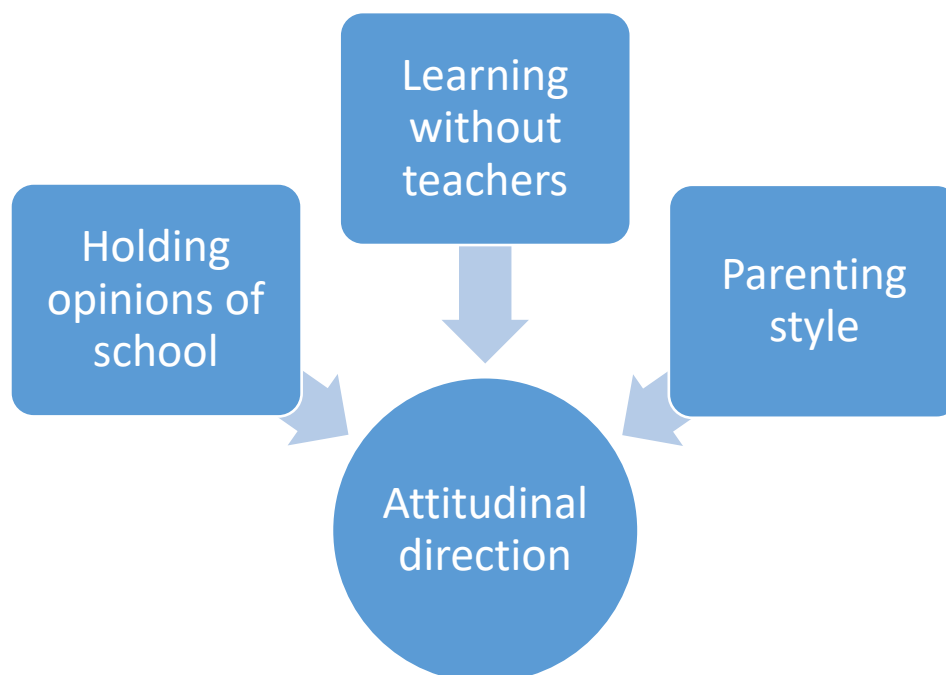
*Figure 6.1: The subcategories that make up the category of **attitudinal direction***

Subcategory 1 - Holding opinions of school

Initially, I constructed a code with the name 'avoiding formality', but after undertaking further interviews, I found that formality of school was not the only concern of the participants. Some other issues mentioned are large class sizes, a one-size-fits-all approach, the reward/punishment system, not enough flexibility, not catering for all learning styles and not enough time for play.

Most of the parents I spoke to had not visited their local school yet held strong ideas about what schools are like. Seven of the mothers were teachers or lecturers, one worked as a part-time assistant in a behavioural school and almost all of the others had a close friend or relative who taught or was a teaching assistant. The qualified teachers appeared confident in their knowledge of local schools. P10 believed it common for teachers to hold similar opinions to her, such as the academic pressures on young children being too great.

P17 (a secondary teacher who was studying for a master's degree in education) was vehemently pro-school in her attitude. '*I loved my school years and it was a huge part of my childhood.*' Her parents were Somalian refugees who did not complete their own education. They greatly valued the opportunities presented to their children in their new countries (Denmark and eventually Britain). The presence of other parents with an anti-school stance at her mosque caused her to investigate home education. She said:

> *To be honest with you I never ever, ever, ever, ever thought that I would ever home school, it never occurred to me, I used to think that, even with an educational background. I always used to think that people who home school, 'you should not do that'.*

Those with a strong anti-school attitude often commented on their own school days without any prompting from me. For example, P15 said:

> *…just a very poor experience of school from my own personal point of view. Very similar to my eldest, I found school boring and spent most of the time looking out of the window*.

Of all the participants, I felt P1 held the strongest anti-school attitude. She believed that all schools should be closed down to be replaced with something more organic. She stated: '*Erm…I had a very bad experience in school, really, really bad*'. P15 also held strong opinions: '*I just think ….it's not fit for purpose but my children want to go'*. P2 described her husband's experience and compared his personality to that of her youngest daughter. This is P2's interpretation of course so we cannot be certain that she is not exaggerating his story to illustrate her point:

> *(Daughter) is more like (Husband), he daydreamed throughout school, they mentioned space once and he listened, but he was not engaged for six years of primary, which was really sad. Little kids can't really explain*.

Even the journey to and from school was perceived as stressful. P2 dreaded the idea of taking one child to nursery and another to school before getting herself to work. P12 (who at the time of her first interview was considering removing her eldest from school and home educating her second child from the start) believed the school run to be the worst part of the day. P4 called it a '*battle*', noting that his daughter witnessing stressed-out parents trying to park seemed to add to her anxiety, the calm of home and alternative settings being the antidote.

The potential negative impact of other children at school was a concern to some parents. They had heard of other children (or experienced their own) saying things they did not previously say or losing interests they held. P12 stated that, upon been told they were for boys, her daughter changed her opinion of her favourite characters 'The Power Rangers'. P13 mentioned wanting to control the influences the child is exposed to:

> *Nieces and nephews and godchildren come home from school saying things they didn't say before or interested in stuff they weren't into before, it's a massive influence on them along with T.V. and things. It scared me that you kind of lose a lot of control.*

In my interviews, there were numerous mentions that learning should be child-centred, child-led and following the child's interests. The parents I interviewed spoke of their child/children having special personality characteristics such as an energy that was very strong, or being creative, active, or having low self-esteem. P14 stated a sentiment expressed by most participants:

> *I think children seem to start in reception with like massively creative minds and full of their own daily ways of doing things. School, the way it is just seems to narrow them all down.*

One parent directly stated she did not like the catchment primary school and others also alluded to this. P2 moved from a state school to an independent one when she was small. She has no memory of the first school, but recalled her mother telling her it was because '*it was noisy and crazy and I wanted to work*'. The area where P2 lives is very close to a large city centre and she perhaps perceived that her children's catchment schools had similar atmospheres to the one she left when she was a child.

One of the factors that added to the stress felt by P21's primary aged children was the large class sizes (36 and 40). P4 also had some experience of school before he chose to remove his daughter. In reception year, she was in an open plan classroom with sixty children. Some children found it so loud they would use ear defenders. He believed that although children get used to it, it is not a normal environment.

Some parents would be willing to send their child to a school if it met their requirements. For example P6: '*Maybe if we lived somewhere else and it had a Montessori school, that's probably what I would've done'*. P13 formed a strong affinity toward the Steiner approach whilst her son was at a Steiner nursery. She then decided to move her family to an area where he could attend a state Steiner Primary School fee-free. At that time there were only four such schools in the country. The notion that in the UK people move house to be near what they consider to be a good school surprised P4 as it is unheard of in California, from where he originated.

P18 was previously an art teacher but became a sociology researcher following her PhD. Her attitude was not entirely against schools, but in the way that they are organised, in that the children are segregated, both socially and academically. This was because she returned to Northern Ireland where she had been raised having been a teacher in London. Most schools in Northern Ireland divide children by religion and/or gender and she objected to this aspect of the system. This is another example of cultural influences affecting the attitudes of a participant.

P14 and her partner were also qualified teachers. She too is not against schools completely, but to the types available to her:

We used to teach in an international school in Slovakia for a couple of years, it was the same system being a British school but there was so much more leeway. Every week we'd pop up to the woods and the children had proper outdoor clothes. There wasn't the pressure from SATs or Ofsted. It was the international primary curriculum; it was free to interpret your own way.

P14's attitudinal direction was generally pro-school, and this is probably due to her having enjoyed her own school years '*I went to a little village school which is a very different experience to the schools I taught in.*' She fondly recalled '*risky play*' and being outdoors. The fact that she chose a career as a teacher suggests that an affinity toward schools was present in the past. At the time of her first interview, the couple were planning to relocate to find a school in the countryside or suitable alternative educational setting after a year of travelling. The last contact I had with her was by email (when she told me she'd had more time to reflect on her answers when writing them down). This segment captured the nostalgia that influenced her attitude to school as well as the reasoning behind her present opinions:

I do wonder as a bit of an aside about the type of people that reject school, and anecdotally, a lot of them seem to be teachers. I wonder if they are more likely to feel confident, not only in providing a decent education for their children but also in understanding what it is they reject when they reject school. Teachers know the overcrowding, monotony, lack of creativity, formulaic responses that modern education brings but many parents may just have happy memories of their own experience of primary school and initially at least perhaps assume it is still the same. If I could send (son) and (daughter) to a school like the one I went

to in the 80s, I'd be pretty happy! There was a LOT of Plasticine and afternoons

on the field!

The parents with strongly negative attitudes to traditional schooling were highly motivated and made huge sacrifices in the pursuit of their goal. According to Krosnick and Petty (1995), strong attitudes are likely to be persistent, resistant to change, likely to affect information processing and to predict behaviour. I observed the motivating power of attitudes in the participants who were very anti-school and would go to great lengths to avoid sending their children. Others were willing to flexi-school or let their child make the decision to attend school when they were older. An example being P15, who wanted to solely home educate, but whose daughter wanted to attend school, eventually becoming full time. In line with Morton (2011) and Rothermel (2003), the attitudes demonstrated in this study lie on a spectrum. My data indicate that people are more likely to act upon strongly held attitudes. The participants may have been too young at the time to remember why they hold this attitude towards school, but often referred to a bodily sensation for example, having a gut feeling or unsettledness.
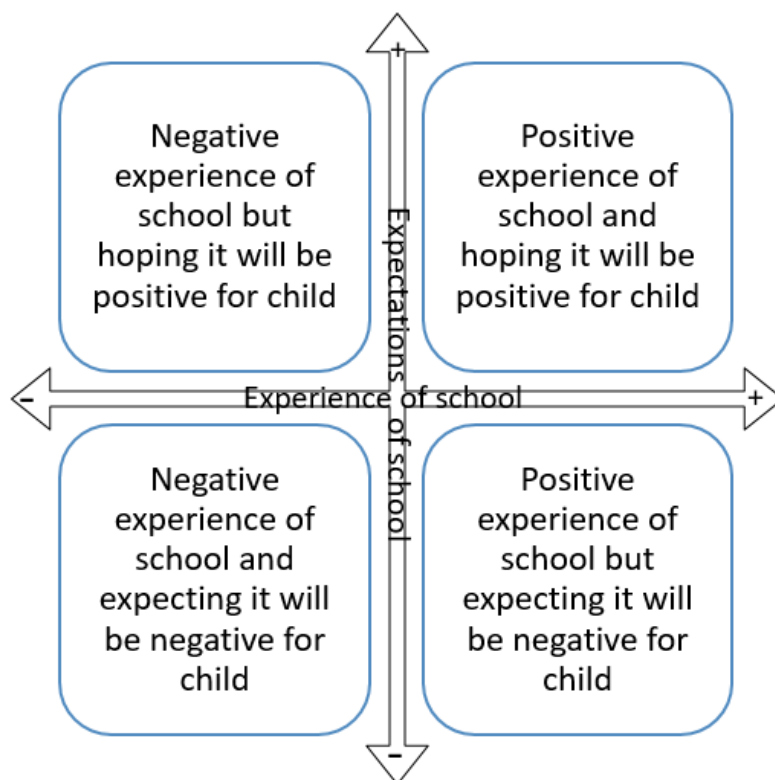
*Figure 6.2: Exploring dimensions of the subcategory **holding opinions of school***

In the above matrix, the vertical axis represents the parent's expectation of how the child

will experience school in the future (positive towards the top) and the horizontal is the

parental experience of school (positive towards the right). Not all parents have an anti-

school attitude: they may instead believe that the schools available to them are not

suitable, or feel that schools have changed since their childhood and so would be placed in

the bottom right quadrant. Class size and climate were concerns noted in the data, such as

children joining a large class, with the teacher not being able to give much attention to them

all. For example, P14 spoke of her former primary school being smaller than the ones

available in the area in which she resided at the time of her first interview.

Parents who had a bad experience of school yet were hoping that their child had a positive

one are most likely not included in this study as their children would be attending

mainstream school (they would be placed in the top left quadrant). Almost all of the participants in this study fall into the bottom half of the diagram. The spectrum of experiences and expectations is broad. Ranging from P1 who spoke of her school years in a very derogatory way and would never risk that happening to her son, to P14 who had fond memories of school before the introduction of a strict curriculum and standardised testing. P21, who enjoyed school and thought that primary schools were very similar to each other would be categorised in the top right quadrant. She did not expect to have such problems in gaining appropriate support for her three adopted children. They initially attended their nearest school until she realised problems were occurring. The second school she chose had trauma informed staff, but she still found discrepancies in provision depending on which class teacher they had. P17 would be similarly categorised as she had enjoyed school but was researching home education as members of her community advocated it. This was an unexpected finding not observed elsewhere in the literature. There may be many communities exerting a similar pull, but no others were recruited in this study.

Cultural influences were indicated by many of the participants, as quite a few grew up in different countries different to that in which they currently reside. The prevalence of home education in California for example meant P4 had no fear of the unknown for his daughter. P7's experience of traveller communities and being withdrawn from school herself instilled in her a confident attitude to educating her daughter herself. P17 grew up as a refugee in Denmark and was not aware of home education even being legal there. Moving to the UK and finding it was common in her community began to alter her attitude, but her prevailing positive opinions of school outweighed the negative attitudes of her friends. The parents who originated from other countries only had first-hand experience of the schools there on which to build their opinions (P1, P4, P6, P11, P17) although P17 became a secondary

teacher in the UK, which was an additional influence. When the participants spoke of school as being part of a 'system', those with first-hand experience of non-British schools seemed to incorporate what they were familiar with into their expectations of their local schools. Instances of the small number of UK schools that the participants attended shaping their opinions are common in the data. For example, P7 had the traumatic experience of racist bullying, P19 felt constant boredom and P13 lost her love of learning. Parents such as P8 rejected the idea of reward and punishment systems as she witnessed them affecting her daughters. P14 admitted that she felt a bit empty as an adult when she did not get recognition and praise having grown so used to it at school. Some of the participants were trying to resist the control of the rules and regulations of the school system. For example, having to take children on holiday at prescribed times, being chastised for wanting an anxious child to go into school late and disagreeing with compulsory uniform at the age of four. P1 referred to schools as being like a regime. These 'oppressive experiences' seem to be a strongly motivating factor for some; a 'catalyst for change' (O'Driscoll, 2016:160).

Another negative attitude held about schools is the idea that there is no possibility of change. Even qualified teacher P14 felt restricted in the way she could teach. The primary school in which she used to work claimed to follow a child-led approach, yet staff were required to plan every session prior to finding out about the children's interests and prior understanding. Attitudes to school may have been different if the participants felt that they had some influence over the running of schools. When asked if she was in the PTFA (Parents, Teachers and Friends Association), P15 said she was not interested at all as she felt it would not change anything. By home educating, parents are completely in control. Around half of the parents interviewed had not visited their local primary school so it is

unlikely that they would have an awareness of parental help being encouraged in many instances.

Interestingly, as with my study wherein a third of the participants had some experience of teaching, around a quarter of Morton's (2011) participants were qualified teachers. A high percentage of teachers was also identified by Thomas (1998) and Stevens (2001). Rothermel (2003) however, found a lower number in her quantitative study. Of the 394 home educating parents that stated their occupation, 13.45% were teachers or lecturers. Teacher parents are professionally qualified to educate their own children and the findings of my study show that they often possess insider knowledge of their local schools which adds a lot of information to the **holding opinions of schools** subcategory.

Subcategory 2 - Parenting style

Mainstream education and childcare being 'unnatural' is a theme I have noticed running through all of the interviews I carried out. This links with natural parenting styles that participants spoke about with enthusiasm. For instance, P6 pointed out to me that at the nursery she briefly tried most of the children were not breastfed and this seemed to be linked to her considering the nursery to be an unnatural place for her child to be. She specifically searched for childminders who were committed to attachment parenting. P10 linked her parenting style to her negative attitude to schools:

> *I think that comes from an attachment parenting type view. It leads on quite*
> *naturally because it's a very child centred way of parenting, it's about taking their*
> *leads. What feels like throwing them into a school full of children doesn't sit with*
> *that.*

The rise in Facebook groups and websites about natural/attachment parenting has led to opportunities for like-minded people to meet and share ideas. The natural parenting

community that P13 was part of had many home educating parents posting. P6 was part of a baby-wearing (sling) group who advocate keeping their child in close contact most of the time. P5 took part in a breastfeeding flash mob in order to challenge the taboo some individuals associate with feeding babies naturally in public places. The formation of attitudes about schools, learning and parenting style predominantly began when the children were very young, before the parent started to think about school choice.

P5 recalled how she found out that school was not compulsory:

A friend of mine I met through the NCT mentioned she wasn't sending her child and was hoping they would set up a Steiner School or something like that. I said 'what do you mean'. She said 'you don't have to send them'. I think it was (friend) that told me they don't send them till they're 7 in Scandinavia, and in Steiner they don't do formal till 7, there was this magic age of 7. We met through a breastfeeding flash-mob. She leant me a book about child development and attachment, and how they shouldn't be separated till a certain age. That gave me the strength and the impetus to pull her out of nursery.

P16 too mentioned her decision being related to parenting style:

I suppose it might sort of come along gentle parenting lines…you find out about different stages they go through, a typical child goes through. Finding out about things to do with that really and trying to facilitate that.

P6 specifically looked for a childminder who followed the principles of attachment parenting. This was an interesting finding as attachment parenting in its very nature means not leaving the child with non-family members. P6, however, wanted and needed to continue with her career and found the childminder to be the ideal setting for her daughter.

P12's parenting style changed with each of her four children. With the first, she was still a student and quickly returned to university and her childfree friends. She recalled that 'Super Nanny' was the discipline style she thought people were supposed to use back then.

> *I breastfed them all for increasing amounts of time. So (daughter 1), I stopped feeding her when I went back to uni. (Daughter 2) was 11 months and I remember thinking that was the most incredible thing. (Daughter 3) is three and she still does now and again.*

Meeting different types of people through baby groups had a massive influence on P12. She described to me how these mothers opened her eyes to things she had not previously considered to be a choice, such as having a caesarean section. It also caused her to question her career as a social worker, and her right to enter clients' houses. This opinion is synonymous with the argument of some home educators that LA inspectors not be granted access to their homes.

P21 and her husband began following the PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, empathy) parenting style after a recommendation by the family's therapist. They had also been attended relaxation for kids for many years. The dedication and care shown by this participant toward her three adopted children (all of whom suffered trauma at a very young age) is a good example of the amount of effort these parents invest into raising happy children.

My study findings show similarities with other authors who noted a rise in natural or intensive parenting, and a desire for education that is child-led (see Aurini and Davies, 2005; Kraftl, 2013a & b). Descriptions of the child's personality were prevalent in my data with examples such as being bright, active, alert, creative, shy, or having high levels of energy.

Schools suppressing creativity was an important factor in some parents' decision-making. The child not being ready emotionally or having low self-esteem were other examples of parents feeling that the school environment did not suit all personality types. Although this finding was similar to Morton's (2011), a key difference was that only one of my participants mentioned a special need compared with over half of her participants who stated that their child had either special educational needs or a personality difference that played a part in their choice to home educate. Of course, 'personality difference' is a vague, subjective term that covers a broad range of characteristics.

Some of the parents in this study were informed about home education through parenting groups either online or by meeting others at physical venues such as NCT (National Childbirth Trust) or baby groups. This finding resonates with Kraftl (2013a) who also found examples of mothers who socialised with home educating families before making the decision and it becoming 'a normal part of that group of parents' (Sarah in Kraftl, 2013a:444). These new contacts may be opening new ways of seeing the world and acting as alternative role models (O'Driscoll, 2016). The rise in information sources about parenting and groups online is likely to be facilitating the clustering of those who share similar attitudes. An Australian large scale, mixed methods study demonstrated that although these online sources facilitate making connections and finding answers and support, they can potentially lead to parents feeling isolated and, in some cases experiencing bullying. The reasons for this were that strong opinions are expressed e.g. about breastfeeding and that posts can be contributed anonymously (Strange et al., 2018).

 By removing themselves from the workforce, not engaging in mass childcare and only allowing a small number of people to influence their child, home educators are in charge of

how their children grow up. Hays (1996) believes that mothers with this viewpoint are carrying out a subtle act of resistance to the corruption, greed, and competition in society. My study illustrates this with examples of parents rejecting the rewards and sanctions systems, testing, curriculum restraints and of course, the influence of other children. Some parents view home education as a way to prolong the time that the child has already spent learning and developing at home. Those participants in my study who were not completely against school wished to lengthen this phase. They were willing to consider school when the child is ready, for example, at the age of seven. Merry and Howell (2009) refer to this as a natural extension of good mothering. My findings are very similar in this regard. The rise in popularity of attachment parenting could be contributing to the opinion that some parents in this study expressed of their children being too young to go to school.

Of course, some children are younger than others at the start of the reception year (September for most children in England). P13, whose eldest child was born at the end of August, received comments from friends about the possibility of him lagging behind. The press reports I introduce in Chapter 6 about studies demonstrating the impact of being the youngest children in the class had clearly affected them and this became a significant concern in her mind. P9 perceived her daughter as too young for full-time attendance and stated that she sometimes became tearful due to tiredness. There is a change to established routines and family dynamics when a child goes to school. The natural and attachment parenting styles mentioned by some participants are disrupted, those spending time outdoors and learning through home activities and visits must relinquish this on weekdays and trust the class teacher to take over. The parents have become used to being at home with the child(ren) and the thought of transporting them to schools and nursery before work or the child being at school while their sibling(s) were at home was a problem

mentioned. P12 wished she could retain closeness between her children and decided to remove her eldest daughter from school despite her being happy there. Similar comments were stated by Morton's (2011) participants in that the children were tired after school and that the routine of getting ready took up time that should have been spent together.

Attending an environment where others can influence their child is seen by parents as negative. Some feel that the child's natural personality will be repressed by having to conform to cultural stereotypes such as P12's daughter changing her opinion of her favourite TV characters after being told by others that they were for boys. Being stereotyped or led to comply with stereotypes is demonstrated by the work of Fields-Smith and Williams (2009) and Lois (2009). Black home educators in Fields-Smith and Williams' 2009 study were trying to avoid their children being stereotyped in school, even by the teachers. Similarly, Lois (2009) gave the example of a mother who was determined that her son would not become a boy who does not express emotions in a healthy way. These parents clearly view psychological harm to their children as being as damaging as physical harm. Conversely, some outsiders label home educating parents as irresponsible and it is common for strangers to make comments. An example from the data is P12 who had friends that expressed opinions that she may be damaging her children. As with the parents in my study, Lois (2009) also found her participants were used to having to defend their status as a good mother.

Parents in my study expressed the longing for their children to engage in carefree play, which is not too risky. P12 spoke of a children's woods where they can roam free without getting lost. P14 fondly recalled playing on junk on a farm as a child and wished her children could play out, at the time of her first interview she did not view it as possible in her

neighbourhood. Nostalgia played a role in her search for the perfect setting. Providing 'risky play' that allows children to gain confidence and control of their bodies is important in development according to Tovey (2011). Seemingly the 'risky play' that these parents long for does not include being with random children in their local neighbourhood but elsewhere in a controlled environment. Finding a neighbour to play with on her cul-de-sac has however been a positive experience for P3 and 4's daughter who was gaining independence by going out to play. There is a contradiction in the data shown where parents wish to control who their children mix with yet wish for their child to experience different types of people and become confident and independent.

Subcategory 3 - Learning without teachers

The fact that that most of the parents would have to educate their children themselves, a job usually undertaken by skilled professionals, did not seem to be a concern. Some parents interviewed mentioned that they felt capable of teaching and others believed that children learn naturally.

As shown in Chapters 2 and 5, some home educators use a structured approach with workbooks and timetable. However, almost all of the ones I interviewed preferred a more autonomous approach which is flexible, and child led. P9 stated '*When I sort of watch children playing, the way children learn naturally…that's not really replicated in school.*' P9 was flexi-schooling in the reception year as it was allowed before compulsory school age at the time of this study. She ended up sending her daughter full-time when the school did not agree to her request once compulsory school age had been reached. In her first interview, she stated that she wanted to be able to follow the interests of the child but still give her the opportunity to gain GCSEs and fully integrate into society.

P2 was following the interests of her children and did not structure the learning at all. They went on impromptu trips and she took part in home education groups focussing on topics such as French and dance. She confidently stated:

> *We realised it was possible and we could do it, we are not trained teachers but we*
> *don't need to be trained as we are not in a school but we are well-educated people*
> *and we have a computer to look up the rest. We'd got the will so we thought we'd*
> *just try it.*

There seems to be a focus on English and maths in even the most autonomously (informal/child-led) educating families. This seems contradictory, as they may have stated that learning happens naturally, but most were making sure their child was competent in these areas. P2 used web packages for her eldest daughter to learn reading and maths; she did not enforce their usage but let the child lead on how long/often to engage with them. P5 also subscribed to a reading scheme and allowed her daughter to choose when to make use of it.

Despite paying for forest-type school and another part-time alternative setting, P3 and P4's daughter spent time each week with an ex-teacher to ensure her numeracy and literacy were of a good standard. Additionally, P4 taught a little maths to his daughter as he had a computing background. They also used Khan Academy (a website with various subjects at many levels). The awareness of a need for their children to gain certain skills suggests that home education may only be a temporary measure and that the children might 're-enter the system' at some point in the future. This is a principle illustrated by parents who delayed formal learning rather than avoiding it completely. For example, P5 who stated that originally they thought they would keep the children out of school until the '*magic age of*

seven'. Others mention this age with regard to Scandinavian schooling (which I explore further in Chapter 6). P13 praised this aspect of the Steiner approach '*not to do anything formal until 7, which is what a lot of European countries do'*. P10 too had carried out '…r*esearch into other countries others in the EU that don't go to school till later and just children being children'*.

P10 said that she was trying not to think long term:

> *…initially I thought "keep him off to the age of seven and then I'd put him in" but because I feel very much they will learn things at their own pace, if I put him in at seven and he hasn't learnt to read then in a school sense he will be behind. And I don't think that would be fair on them.*

P3 sometimes worried that their daughter would go for a while without seeming to learn but the whole family was happier once she was out of the school where she had been anxious. She stated:

> *I think she's not learning things like times tables. I think she should be knowing that by now and then she just comes out with it. She's learning just though life, maybe not the same terminology. She just knows stuff and learns stuff when she's ready. I've had certain periods when I think she's not learning and then suddenly…it's like a surge of getting stuff.*

Some of the parents held strong opinions on the learning process. They may have gained these from their research on schools or from their own past experiences. P7 stated that:

> *The wanting to learn has to be there. With her, we learnt five words the other day because she wanted to. When she doesn't want to learn anymore we stop doing it*.

The belief that learning happens independently of school and teachers was prevalent in the data. P6 expressed absolute confidence in her childminder's ability to teach by stating that *'she is an educator from heaven'.* Not only did P6 praise her childminder's knowledge of educational theories, but she appreciated the time the childminder spent taking the children outdoors as well as in the family home. Arguably, this was as close to a natural child rearing experience that P6 could find whilst still being able to continue with her career.

P13 had no doubt that she could educate her child herself. At the start of the study, she was considering an independent (fee paying) Steiner school. She stated, '*I could go back to work full-time to pay for it, but why go to work to pay for someone to teach my children when I can do it myself?*' Spending time outdoors was P13's priority and she explained to me how they look things up in books after a walk in the woods such as types of fungi. One aspect of the Steiner education system that appealed to her was her child growing and cooking vegetables, as the family did at home.

The alternative setting that follows some of the principles of forest school does have teachers and at the time of my study was considering a curriculum with different subjects each day. This change may have reflected parental demands. None of the parents whom I interviewed used it for more than one day and the children of P8 (who had started at the school) have since moved on to an independent high school.

The parents expressed opinions about how children learn and some believed that schools restrict learning. P7 stated that schools:

> *…teach to pass the test, tick the box and get the grade. For me, it's about the process of learning rather the outcome of learning so that has influenced my decision.*

This attitude pertaining to learning being impeded by a focus on outcomes has roots in the early experiences of some participants. For example, P13 who felt that her own experience of education negatively affected her love of learning for learning's sake, especially when striving for an extrinsic reward. P8 likened it to being on a treadmill, constantly being judged and leading to self-doubt. P14 too felt she was always working for rewards; she stated:

> It was like that with me. I was a really super conscientious student, loved getting praise and top marks. When you leave uni - you've no one to tell you well done coz you got the job, you don't get a certificate and think what did I do it all for then? It takes a while to rethink your thinking if you manage to do that or maybe you feel unfulfilled all the time.

At the start of the study, P9 had made the decision to keep her reception-aged daughter out of school one day a week (against the wishes of the head teacher). She believed that children learn naturally through play and that school does not facilitate that.

In contrast with the majority of participants who believed that learning takes place without teachers, P17 expressed concern that she would not be able to cover all subjects as one of her reasons for deciding not to home educate. P17 helped at a tuition centre for home educated children, and believed that had they been in school some would have been diagnosed with learning difficulties. She was a geography teacher but did not think she would be able to teach maths. She believed teachers to be the experts yet pressure from her community made her question her core beliefs and thoroughly research home education.

P21 had positive experiences in schools, both as a pupil and teacher but expressed frustration that the primary school would not adapt the curriculum to her nine year old

daughter who was developmentally behind her peers. P21 stated that at home: '*she's like having a great big massive reception child in that she just bimbles around, she loves sensory stuff, she loves messy play'.* The school insisted on repeating the same maths tasks daily in one-to-one sessions, oblivious to the fact that she did not retain the knowledge the next day and were not open to trying new methods. Her home education style included a structured day with reading and maths in the morning followed by a mindful, creative activity and then topic-based work on themes chosen by the children for example under the sea and the body.

> *So the change in (daughter) is dramatic, since she's been at home with us the change is unbelievable. So she's not had any toileting accidents all week . (Daughter) normally wakes every 40 minutes and shouts to check we are there. For as long as I can remember she's not done that, she's had one bad dream last week.*

The parents interviewed all showed confidence in their opinion that knowledge that learning does not need to take place in a school or with teachers. All of the parents were interested in child development and the learning process. None, except P17, had concerns about covering different curriculum subjects. It was a minor consideration for most.

P12 received very negative comments about her choice to home educate from her schoolteacher best friend yet had support from her sister who also taught in a primary school. P15 did not have faith that the teachers knew her daughter's level of ability, stating that her daughter had a very high reading age and that she was not in the correct maths group. P17, also a teacher, held the opposite attitude; she valued teachers as necessary for learning and knowing how much specialist knowledge teachers held made her certain she could <u>not</u> teach every subject. This surprised me because, as a geography teacher, she

probably had many skills regarding data handling, essay writing, human geography, science and nature.   Others had no doubt in their ability to teach such as P2 who confidently stated that she and her husband could teach most things and that they had the internet for the rest. P3 stated that everyone used spellcheck these days. Improvements in technology have led to the development of online courses and it is now possible to follow university lectures and free courses online. Home educating parents in my study found facilitating their child's learning to be very enjoyable. Their own interest in the activities they provided most likely plays a part in motivating their child as much as the topic they are pursuing. This has been shown in the literature on mainstream educating parents; for example, those who enjoyed helping their child with their homework were shown to increase the levels of motivation and decrease negative emotions that their associated with homework (Katz et al., 2011).

In Chapter 2, I cited studies where parents started with more formal teaching methods but then transitioned to more informal approaches. Fensham-Smith (2017) refers to these pre-planned, formal activities as visible pedagogies. Parents in my study may have adopted more formal approaches as reassurance that their child was making progress such as when P12 described having to show her partner workbooks and making folders for her children's work. She would not have felt the need to do this if she thought he shared her views on home education. P3 worried occasionally that no learning was occurring, but she described her daughter suddenly understanding a concept and making a big leap forward. P3 and P4 employed a tutor for maths and English even though their daughter attended two alternative providers. My findings reiterate Morton's (2011) in that even the parents who strove to be autonomous maintained some aspects of traditional schooling. Her participants mentioned examples such as a book on how to read and using a Kumon (private) maths tutoring programme. She believes that these were admitted to with a touch

of guilt. Examples such as these demonstrate that it is impossible to strictly categorise home educators into types as they do not tend to fully subscribe to one method of facilitating their child's learning.

Another example of home education not to conforming to a single definition is that, rather than being a binary choice of home or school, there are many settings and groups that can be mixed and matched. In the present study this is exemplified by the use of part-time provision, a childminder's home and flexi-schooling. Kraftl (2013b) noted the transition from using the home to finding a variety of other learning spaces. He believes that there is a complicated interplay between people, physical locations and online groups involved in the field of 'home' education. It seems that taking advantage of any flexibility in the system is quite common; a study of Australian children illustrated that transitioning between types of provision available is prevalent there (Jackson, 2007). Morton's (2011) 'natural' home educators who rejected formal qualifications still had ambitions for further and higher education. All of her groups showed pragmatism in their aims to reintegrate and achieve career goals. Fensham-Smith (2017) also noted this transition back from invisible to visible pedagogies in order to gain qualifications but that some struggled to gain access to their preferred courses. They have often successfully learnt without teachers but not met the fixed entry requirements of colleges etc. Being able to step back into the system may not be an easy option for these students. This finding is an example of the concept of **tunnelling between** which I outline later in this chapter. It reveals an awareness parents possess that they can provide their child with opportunities that allow them to enter different types of educational setting and ultimately, career pathways.

In the next section, I introduce the category of **surveying the landscape**. One aspect of surveying is **hearing opinions of others** and there are close links between this and the **attitudinal direction** category.

Category 2 - Surveying the landscape

Initially, this was a code labelled 'research' but I started to see it in a different way to the other categories. Information gathering is a process that is ongoing throughout life. It summarises both the formal research that parents set out to do intentionally, plus the informal, often subconscious uptake of information via conversations with other people.

Formal research by parents facilitates the negotiation of the major barriers, in that practical solutions can be found (by asking people or looking online), and beliefs and feelings can be strengthened or challenged.   For example, feelings of anxiety can be alleviated by the discovery of a like-minded group or suitable alternative setting. Feelings are mentioned by some of the participants as having played a role in their decision.

This category is composed of the subcategories: **hearing the opinions of others**, **formally researching** and **following feelings.**
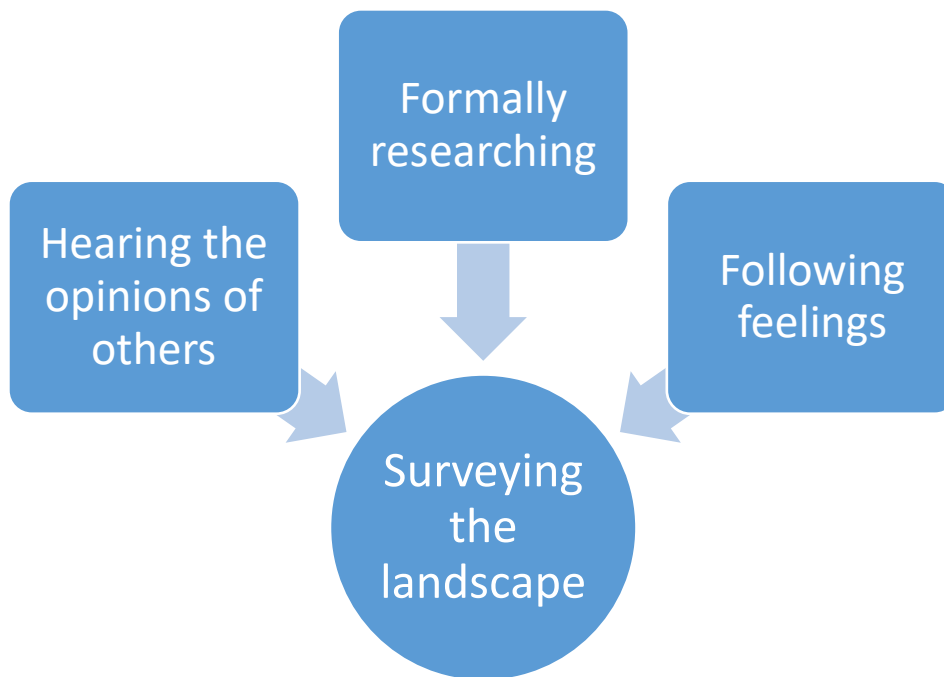
*Figure 6.3: The subcategories that make up the category of **surveying the landscape***

Subcategory 1 - Hearing the opinions of others

The range of opinions in this subcategory ranges from having supportive grandparents and friends, to those who avoided the opinions of others by delaying even telling them they were considering home education, as they felt they would be judged as silly or ungrateful. This subcategory also includes hearing information about schools; for this reason, there is some overlap with the formation of attitudes about schools, learning and parenting.

Most of the parents stated that their opinions had been influenced by others such as P6 not liking the sound of the 'traffic light' punishment system in school that she heard about from a parent who used to use her childminder. P16 acknowledged that her opinions of schools formed through speaking to others:

I've got some people who are teachers...positive life-affirming kind of way, live and breathe their job and then the other end who...don't really like how schools are going and, in an ideal world we would be less restricted by the ridiculous things the

government has put upon us. Been a little while since I was at school so the things that you see and the beliefs about what school is like are formed by...who you socialise with or who have children that are already in school a bit older or who are working in school day in day out.

Conversely, teacher friends and family may be defensive of their profession and express their concerns about home education. P12 received a very negative response:

My friend was really angry about it. Because she is a teacher, she felt it was an insult. She said "I went to uni for four years and you think you can just teach?" I'm more wary of speaking to her because she's one of my best friends so if she thinks that, what would other people think?

P13's mother-in-law worked as a teaching assistant and often sung the praises of schools' outdoor space and play-based activities to try to convince P13 that school was good. P13 stated she does not:

...see it the same way. She doesn't see that growing tomatoes isn't the same as growing seasonal things and picking and having it in the earth.

P17 is a very interesting case. Despite feeling pressure from peers in her community that she might negatively affect her child by sending her to school, she found evidence to convince herself that school was the right place for her daughter. Hearing staff opinions about a child at a tuition centre (who she believed had undiagnosed learning difficulties) may also have played a part in her decision not to home educate.

Upon **surveying the landscape** of primary schools to seek a more suitable one for her youngest two children, P21 sought the advice of the virtual head of looked after children for her town. When she realised a special school would be needed for her eldest son, she

valued the opinions of parents of special needs children. These were easy to find on forums and websites. This is an example of **surveying the landscape** of educational provision whist also considering home educating.

Those participants who feel there is a stigma attached to discussing their decision may lead to them avoiding **hearing the opinions of others** or finding that others seek to avoid them. For example, subsequent to sharing posts and articles online, P5 was unfriended on Facebook by a person who did not agree with her opinions. She felt that her conviction to the benefits of home education might have made others question the fact that they were accepting school as the default, and that she made them feel uncomfortable. She believed that the process of her Facebook sharing articles that praised home education and the problems associated with school actually reinforced her decision. Hearing negative opinions strengthened her **attitudinal direction** towards home education and away from schools. A few parents said that others were surprised that home education and flexi-schooling are legal; they often had to explain themselves to strangers. Those that already had home educating friends seemed to have more confidence in explaining their choices to others. P14 did not have any other friends with children who shared her view. She searched online, initially for advice about travelling with babies, and found a website written by someone with similar ideologies. She stated:

> *When I find these little pockets of people it makes me think yeah I'm not going to back down and change my ways coz it's weird when you think something but you don't talk about it all the time you assume you're the only person who thinks it, it's good to read and find out that other people think similarly*.

P9's friend, who taught in a college, warned her that some previously home and Steiner educated children struggled to adapt to the constraints of following the syllabus when returning to formal education. She said they often want to change subjects as they are used to following their interests. This, and other sources of information, led P9 to choose temporary flexi-schooling, offering experience of both formal and alternative education. She wanted her child to be able to integrate fully into society later in life.

P19 felt that finding somebody to talk about home education with at her child's Montessori nursery (coincidentally this turned out to be P15, recruited via another avenue) normalised her views; she felt validated. She was accustomed to people thinking of her as an '*oddball*'. Her friends were vocal about their opinions that she was making the wrong decision. Disconnection from friends and family that disagree does not seem to deter the participants. P14 stated that she often '*baffles*' her parents with the things she does. P12 and P13 do not even discuss it with people they know will not understand. They are avoiding the feeling of discomfort caused by communicating with people to whom they cannot relate.

Members of home education groups do not always confer a feeling of inclusion. P18 found that people were not engaging with her online, and when she moved to Belfast, she found home educating people had very different views for example on religion. She found she was on the 'same page' as the NCT mums. Being on 'the same page' was a sentiment expressed in different ways by several participants. The focussed code I used was initially named 'people like us' but upon further analysis I found that there were more mentions of 'people NOT like us.' Some parents do not wish to be associated with those that they believe lead too much of an alternative lifestyle. P9 stated:

…they're very sort of hippy type of people, which is absolutely fine, we agree with lots of their ideals that they go along with, but the children are very wild and natural. Which is lovely and brilliant but I'm not sure that's how we'd want to do it we'd want to give her the option wouldn't want her to have trouble at college etc.

This statement is very interesting as it shows that the parent was seeking other home educators (i.e. they found a group who shared many ideals), but their wish for their child to fit into society later overcame their desire to join the group. This parent was anticipating that her child would need to be able to connect and feel competent in mainstream education in the future, and she had concerns that being around families that are too alternative would affect her child's life chances.

Being perceived as a fully committed home educator proved difficult for parents who were using other provision such as part-time settings or, as in one case, a childminder who home educated. P6 felt like an outsider but was grateful that her childminder researched educational philosophies and participated in the home educating groups on her behalf. This is an example of gaining access and information by proxy. Even online, she did not feel fully welcome as she worked during the day when groups typically met. She had been following online home education bloggers since before her daughter was born. Like P6, P3 did not feel integrated into a home education community because she did not home educate full-time.

We've been to a few groups but it's finding the people that suit you. We almost sit in between because they go to some sort of school; we're not fully home-schooling, we've a foot in both camps.

To some parents, it was a revelation to hear the opinions of people like themselves. When P6 found her childminder, she recalled: *'Things that she said make her sound like a crazy*

alternative person, that was just about right.' P14 said*: 'I find that when I mention it people look at me like "what? It's just for hippies"'*. Although this is not technically 'hearing' an opinion, the facial expression described implies they have communicated a negative attitude. P5 expressed relief when she found people she could get along with:

> *I think there's sometimes a perception that everyone's a bit odd' and 'the stereotypical home edder is a crusty hippy type who is alternative in every other aspect of their life but now I'm meeting a lot of home edders who are just regular 'normal' people*.

Seeking those who share the same opinion however was not always easy; for example, P1 struggled to find people who shared her strong views about setting up an alternative setting in the UK:

> *Here they love meeting, having tea, having a chat but when you get to the nitty-gritty of democratic education, curriculum, teachers and doing it every day. Realised very quickly they love meeting, maybe for activities, but there's no structure. They are not willing to put in time, effort and money.*

Initially the opinions she heard may have been in alignment with her own, but the other home educators were not willing to commit to setting up an alternative educational environment and she believed she could have found more pro-active, organised people in her home country.

Before making the decision to home educate, P12 did not know anybody nearby who home educated and struggled to find anyone online experiencing the same dilemma as her. (P12's eldest daughter was happy in school, but she was considering removing her and also home educating her younger children). The home educators she found had removed unhappy or

anxious children, or did not send them to school in the first place. In a later interview, she

spoke about finding somebody at a toddler group and sharing her ideas. This new friend

subsequently also made the decision to become a home educator. In this case, **hearing the**

opinions of others could be applied in the opposite direction as P12's positive opinions of

home education persuaded her new friend to research it for herself.

In this section, I provide answers to emergent research question 2: How and why do

potential home/alternative educators gather information about alternatives to mainstream

education? After the participants have discovered the possibility of home education, they

survey the metaphorical landscape. The internet has changed this part of the process in

recent years. Before the internet, mostly nearby facilities and support groups could be

accessed e.g. through advertisements at libraries, toddler groups or museums. Information

was available in books, but the parent could not easily discuss their concerns with the

author.   Nowadays, parents receive instant replies online, unrestricted by geographical

location. Some discover information easily and others take time finding what they require.

There are many other factors involved at this stage including, where they live and the types

of people they have met already e.g. at baby groups.

The parents I interviewed were used to hearing negative opinions about home education,

even from their own parents. This finding echoes that of Nelson (2013). It is common in the

literature to read that strangers in public comment on children being out of school and do

not withhold their judgement for example that children will not be able to socialise (Ray,

2017).

Hearing opinions of others also includes information about schools. Teachers regularly talk

about their classes with friends and family. It is human nature to mention difficulties with a

job or unusual situations. The participants who were not teachers themselves all had a friend or relative who worked in a school. P13 mentioned that she had family members whose children were not happy at school. Any negative comment heard will contribute to strengthening their **attitudinal direction**.

This informal stage holds more weight than the formal information gathering stage; which may be more to reinforce the decision already held from 'gut feeling' or instinct. P5 spoke of sharing the articles making her decision stronger. P12 said the more she read the stronger she felt about it.

Seeking information online will comprise part of the next subcategory, as it is more formal. Once the participants join forums and home education groups such a Facebook, they are relieved that others share their point of view. A feeling of validation and a sense that they are not alone is a refreshing change from the defensive stance some have previously had to take. I discuss the role of feelings in the final subcategory of this section.

Subcategory 2 - Formally researching

Once the idea of home education had occurred to the parents, they looked to find out more. This is very easy to do now that online material is readily available. Some home educators are evangelical about the benefits and a quick search of the home schooling category on Amazon.com yielded 10,900 books.

P12 was eager to share YouTube clips with me by Sir Ken Robinson that likened schools to being a production line with a one-size fits all approach. It was a well-made film by a highly regarded academic and the sentiments it presented evoked an emotional reaction in me (see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDZFcDGpL4U).   After one film is viewed on YouTube, the software suggests others. This process can lead to bias, as each one will have

a similar theme to the last. For example, up next it listed: a film with a 13 year old giving up school to educate himself, a person suing the school system, seven about schools killing creativity and others about how to be creative. P12 stated that the more she learned about home education, the stronger she felt about it. Researching the topic led to an emotional reaction in the participants known as an affective response (I include sections on emotions in Chapter 6). This strengthened their beliefs, and may have caused them to look at their own memories of school in a different light. P12 described the feeling as '*when you click with something*'. She was quickly convinced but continued to seek evidence. '*The more I read about it the more I want to do it. I think it's great. I've got to do more research for my partner'.*

Sharing of articles with friends online strengthened P5's position and made her feel more secure in her decision to home educate her daughters. Comparable to YouTube's algorithms, Facebook suggests news feed articles and pages to 'like' depending on what has previously been written (or even spoken about with new 'listening' technologies).

P2 spoke of reading a book she was given called 'Free Range Education' by Terri Dowty. Books are often passed from more well-informed home educators to those who are undecided. The passing on to friends of books that have influenced you is a common thing to do. This is how I came to read 'The Continuum Concept'. This book had a profound effect on my friend, a mother of four. She became an attachment-parenting advocate, and after reading it, I felt quite guilty about how I had raised my three children. I even mentioned some of the techniques to my sister who stated that she then felt she could harm her child by working full-time. I feel this personal recollection is important as it demonstrates how information can evoke an emotional response and how this can quickly spread to others.

Home education websites provide a vast resource of legal information, activities, support networks and personal stories. Answers to questions that may have caused doubt can be found quickly. Hearing about other people's positive experiences relieves anxiety associated with uncertainty over the future. English is P11's second language. She was very grateful for the online letter templates to use when applying to flexi-school. Her son's Head teacher turned her down twice before authorising her request. P9 was also turned down but she kept her child at home one day a week until she reached compulsory school age. P9 and P11 believed the online support and information to be invaluable. P9 also used the Devon County Council website for home education information. P5 on the other hand remembers her local authority page implying that school was compulsory.

The internet was also utilised by participants to search for a suitable school. Their criteria often included outdoor space and a child-centred approach. P15 drove four miles each way to access a school that would accommodate her flexi-schooling demands and that she felt was a 'nurturing' environment. P16's favourite school would have required a drive that she did not wish to do. Another school she dismissed was considered to be the best in the area from an academic perspective:

> *One of the schools that we looked at was the best primary school in the league table, but to me that just seemed like a hot house, it seemed very, very academic, the kids were all like heads down working they were not like children. I know there's a time and a place for being quiet and getting on with your work but everywhere we looked was like that and it seemed too much.*

Once P18 had realised she did not want to home educate, she began to look for schools. She had stated that she did not want to home educate in isolation and knew she would have

to work hard to build social connections for her children. For P18, school choice became more about the people than the outdoor space or curriculum:

> *My youngest school went to the local nursery school but the local schools were Catholic and also gender divided coz they like to do that in Ireland. So I just couldn't be dealing with that. I ended up getting him into a school that was close to the university. Mainly, the decision, that was really about diversity, the school was socially diverse in terms of class, diverse in terms of nationality and in terms of religion. So it was a real, real mix of people.*

The internet is a useful resource for finding out about schools but the information can be considered too focussed on pupil outcomes and academic subjects. P14's friends often judged schools by these standards. When chatting about where they would send their children P14 noted that they might say something like: '*this one's really good, they get great SATs and Ofsted grade. To me, that's not the measure of a good school*'.

P21 expressed the opinion that Ofsted reports mean nothing. She visited her four local high schools for open evenings, met with the SENCOs and had private tours before deciding that her middle son would not be cared for appropriately in any of them. For example, upon inquiring about the fact her child would not write (even though he could), she was told he would have a scribe but be in the bottom set. She fought for him to start year 7 in a nurture group, with only 8 children, at the same special school her eldest attended.

Being able to choose which school their child would attend leads to feelings of autonomy. It could, however lead to frustration if there were no places available or it was too far away.

Participants usually found home education groups online initially and considered them a valued source of information, both about activities and about the legal side of home education. Knowing that others were having the same experiences and worries was reassuring for parents.

The range of activities available for home educated children was viewed as impressive. P2 was very pleased with the groups she had found: '*Lots going on, every possible physical activity goes on and things like philosophy and science club*'. Her daughter had been to French, drama, art ballet and gymnastics. The focus seemed to be on fun activities. A group P5 attended met at the local indoor ski slope. She thought it was fantastic that the place was so quiet while other children were in school.

Formally researching allows the discovery of not only social activities but being part of a community of parents was also important for some in that expertise could be shared within the group. For example, P13 stated:

> *Every day there are groups going on. We are part of the nature group. It's age appropriate. There's a maths group. Parents teaching different stuff. Maths genius mum teaches all the kids maths. It's really lovely so they're not just taught by parents and there are other children there.*

Had P19 been able to convince her partner to home educate, she would have liked a group of parents to share the teaching load. There are strong overlaps here with the subcategory above about attitudes to **learning without teachers**. This aspect also links to the final category of **negotiating obstacles,** as groups can be sources of information and support, therefore enabling barriers to be overcome.

Most parents mentioned formally researching alternatives to mainstream school but they were often expensive or not available in every area. Paying for a private Steiner School for three children was beyond the means of P13. P6 would have chosen a Montessori school had there been one nearby. P19 also appreciated the Montessori approach:

> *We looked at all the local schools, and we also considered the possibility of leaving her at the Montessori nursery that she was at as they had the elementary there so she could've stayed, but we don't have the resources to pay for that.*

Formally researching to find a setting that fits with the beliefs of participants is a priority for those not wishing to home educate full time e.g. P6's childminder and the alternative setting for P7. P3 was aware of a group who were trying to set up a Steiner school when she found the alternative setting and 'forest-type' school she eventually chose. At the time, the Steiner School project was only a part-time kindergarten for 3-6 year olds. Upon researching and then visiting a Steiner playgroup, P14 (who said she was used to 'rabbly' SureStart style playgroups) felt soothed by the pastel colours, wooden toys and calm demeanour of the staff member. She recalled the way her child was approached:

> *He was always quite shy and quiet, I wasn't too sure he was having fun although I knew it was good for him. When I went to the Steiner it was really natural and quiet, painted pastel-coloured wooden, such a Zen room. The woman came to the door and started making lion noises. He loved it. There were only 5 or 6 children it was much quieter. But at the time I'd never seen him just talk to a stranger before.*

P14 believed the staff member had been trained to show an interest in the child, and really listen rather than firing questions at him. She believed very much in the rights of the child and felt drawn to the nursery adjoining the alternative setting (run by P1) when they told

her about their policy of inviting the child to have their nappy changed, and letting them choose their own activities.

Nurseries and kindergartens following alternative educational principles seem more common in the data than provision for children beyond compulsory school age. It may be that having been able to access these for free, or at a reduced cost gives the parents the hope or aspiration that their child could continue to be educated in that way.

P7 was fortunate the year I interviewed her as she discovered she was eligible for help with costs, she was unsure as to whether this would continue after the age of five:

> I always thought "*I wish that I could afford to send her to a forest school or alternative education*" *and then I found out that tax credits could pay as it is childcare fees. And really that's how I can do it, because if that didn't happen I wouldn't have been able to afford it*.

An alternative setting is satisfactory for some but not always the perfect match. P14 mentioned that the Steiner kindergarten had some aspects she was not happy with, and P6 had heard about Steiner in Israel and regarded them as 'too cultish'. P13 was very pleased that the Steiner kindergarten in her area had a large outdoor space for playing and growing fruit and vegetables. The family had an active, outdoor lifestyle, so this aspect was a priority for them. P14, like P1 and P8, considered setting up alternative settings. As her and her partner were teachers, they could have used their expertise:

> *I had a brainwave that there's an agricultural college near where we are going in Cheshire. I wonder, if I could persuade them they'd let me set up a forest school or farm school on their grounds.*

Most parents did not want to be the only one teaching their child; many would like their child to be confident away from them with a group of children. P13 mentioned that it is sometimes beneficial for children to learn to resolve conflict without the parent around. She had seen this occur in the Steiner kindergarten her son attended part-time. P14 did not like the 24/7 aspect of home education and did not want to be controlling everything her child did: *'That's even more oppressive really, child spending every second with their parent breathing down their neck. I'd like to find a happy medium.'*

Those participants whose children attended alternative settings did not feel the need to participate in home education groups. However, they had researched groups and showed an awareness of what was available. This seemed to be because they knew their child was socialising enough and they wanted to spend the free days at home or on visits together. P1 criticised the fact that there were activities up to a certain age but no motivation to set up alternative education provision. P6 relied on her childminder to take her child to group activities and felt like an outsider. P3 and P7 wanted to spend time with their children on the days they were not at the alternative setting. This was also the case with the flexi-schooling parents interviewed.

This category has relationships with the categories of **receiving support** and **following feelings**. The support groups that are found early on in the process of deciding whether to home educate can have a huge influence on the opinions held and feelings that are felt. Hearing stories of children that have been successfully home educated or horror stories about mainstream school can be very thought provoking.

This subcategory encompasses a variety of information-seeking methods. There are areas of overlap with **hearing the opinions of others** so I decided to place the boundary of this

category at the point where a parent becomes friends or starts chatting online with somebody. This section is about purposeful information seeking behaviour such as reading websites, books, and information about schools and alternative settings. Attending open days, talks, events, and conferences would also be placed in this section. P21 completed a particularly thorough survey of local primary and high schools for her children who have very specific needs. In addition to questioning parents of SEN children on internet forums, she visited potential schools for public open days and private tours and consulted the head of looked after children in her local area.

Some of the parents such as P9, P15, and P19 searched their area and enquired about the possibility of flexi-schooling. P14 scoured the nearby counties and P13 cast her net to the other side of the country for a state-funded Steiner School. Others such as P2, P7, and P10 showed no interest in visiting their local schools as they already had a sense of what they would find.

The vast amounts of information found online gives the illusion of there being more choice. However, this is not necessarily the case. An example being in the case of house buying where many seem to meet requirements but not all are affordable. Having more information could lead to confusion rather than clarity. The illusion of choice may be leading to more dissatisfaction, as the parents become consumers. What they desire may be unrealistic. For example, only those who can afford to move near to the most popular schools can have certainty that their child will gain admission. Alternative schools may be prohibitively expensive and even home education might not be an option as sometimes there are too many obstacles to overcome.

Parents often research schools via websites that proudly advertise their performance in exams, sporting, and cultural achievements. Prospectuses obtained on open days or through the post are glossy and professionally made. Responding to parental desires for their children to be outdoor some state primary schools have started to advertise themselves as 'forest schools'. Upon the discovery of a nursery with forest activities, P20 felt very happy to send her daughter there. This trend of schools adopting forest school activities has been highlighted by Sackville-Ford and Davenport (2019). A Guardian online article querying whether this may be a 'marketing gimmick' has brought this issue to the attention of a more general readership (Lightfoot, 2019). In order to be regarded as a true forest school, six principles must be adhered to which are listed on their website. Two of these principles are that the sessions must be frequent and not just a one off and that the children should be supported to take risks appropriate to the environment they are in (Forest School Association, no date). All six principles are difficult to fulfil in a mainstream school committed to conforming to the national curriculum. Schools that advertise elements of forest schooling seem to appeal to parents like those in this study that desire 'risky play', outdoor activities and a more active education.

Stepping out of mainstream education but into alternatives such as the Steiner group of schools also brings with it a set of different rules and regulations. These schools are part of two, often-conflicting systems, the principles of one being incompatible with the other, in Steiner's case, OFSTED inspections. It seems that the schools that do try to innovate often fail in quality inspections that were designed to monitor schools in a standardised way. Ofsted recently gave 13 of 26 Steiner schools 'inadequate' as their inspection grading. Their concerns regarded the number of exclusions, safeguarding and provision for those with additional needs (Turner, 2019). Three Steiner schools in the South West of England

(including the one utilised by a parent in this study) have since been taken over by a multi academy trust that currently runs Hindu schools and has a focus on spirituality and yoga. Although they will still have 'Steiner origins' stated on their websites, the curriculum will be reviewed, and they will no longer fully subscribe to all of the conditions of being a Steiner School such as no formal education until after the age of six (Allen-Kinross, 2019). The first state funded Montessori School in West Sussex was closed in 2014 after Ofsted judged it to have made no progress following an inadequate inspection. In his letter to governors, Schools Minister, Lord Nash stated:

> *None of the school's teachers were delivering good lessons and all were still consistently inadequate or required improvement* (Gov.uk, 2013)*.*

This conflict between a school's alternative ideology and government inspection criteria was also acknowledged by Hope (2010). This is another example of the providers desiring freedom by **stepping out of the system** but needing to be part of it in order to receive funding and legitimacy.

Subcategory 3 - Following feelings

Following feelings clearly has links with the **attitudinal direction** category. I decided to move it into **surveying the landscape** as parents are using these feelings as information to drive their decision-making. They are surveying their internal landscape (memories and emotions) and I suggest that the participants gave their feelings more weight than formal information they gathered intentionally. I initially named the subcategory experiencing feelings but this did not incorporate the fact that the participants act upon their feelings e.g. in moving toward or away from people or settings. **Following feelings** reflects the role they play in the journey.

In all cases, parents mentioned feelings either before the decision is made or during the time their child is/was being home educated. P5 described it as:

> *Basically, it came from, it was a bit kind of like gut instinct. When I had her I thought "I don't want to send her to school" thought it was compulsory, as you do.*

Some of the others also described their feelings in quite a mild way: an unsettledness or discomfort but not something that needed acting upon immediately. For example: '*It doesn't sit right with me there's no reason for that, it just doesn't feel right in my gut*' (P9) '*Something just didn't feel quite right*' (P10) '*I knew she would need to go to school and I didn't like the idea*.' (P6).

P14 was aware of the fact that she used feelings in decision-making:

> *Anytime I have felt pressured to do something I don't choose (usually the 'sensible' option!) then I quickly regret it and usually end up going back to my gut feeling.*

Comments ranged from having a mild feeling of unease to having actual fear about not sending the child to school. P5 stated: '*Stepping outside of the norm, it's frightening to do that, it really is*'. P3 said about home education: '*I thought it was scary, most British people are mainstream schooled and I had fear about it*'. Conversely, P1 felt her fear related to sending her son to school: '*I felt that risk so threatening personally that setting this up was easier than just sending him to mainstream. I did not want (son) to go through what I went through*.' She used this fear to motivate herself to set up an alternative learning environment. P13 said: '*It scared me that you kind of lose a lot of control.*'

P4, whose child was not enjoying school prior to the study, spoke of his feelings of anxiety. Once P3 and P4 (a separated couple) had made the decision to remove their child from school, they could relax. P4 said: '*I feel a massive sense of relief now*'. His daughter had

been grinding her teeth regularly and this stopped once she was no longer attending mainstream school. Even for the parents who had successfully taken their children out of school, there was anxiety about the decision.

P6, a single mother with no support network in this country, felt loneliness and stress when her child was a baby. Upon finding a childminder who shared her views on child rearing, she was able to remove her child from nursery and became happier and more able to relax at home and work. In addition, she felt her child became less anxious and suffered from fewer illnesses. P21 was experiencing such high levels of stress when her middle son became unhappy at school that she had to take sick leave. She had made the decision to go part-time because of the time commitments of the family's therapy sessions but eventually decided to leave her job. The feelings she experienced upon visiting her four possible options for mainstream high schools cemented her decision to find something different for her middle son. In addition to being disappointed by staff responses to her questions about her son's needs, the physical appearance of the schools was a factor:

> *…things like the feel of the school and the layout of the school. There's a really old school near us that's sort of 70s with really narrow corridors and really low corridors and I knew straight away that (son) wouldn't cope in there because all the children would be coming through*

Participants **survey the landscape** for different reasons depending on their **attitudinal direction** and the strength of feelings. An anti-school person may seek to find alternatives or support groups and if unsuccessful set up their own, for example P1. A less confident anti-school person may be looking for validation of their feelings by finding like-minded individuals. Some parents have strong convictions but require evidence to explain their decision to others or change the opinion of a partner. Parents who are unsure of the

benefits of home education may be looking for information to convince themselves. These participants are likely to have had a more positive experience of school.

The participants in this study recalled many instances of experiencing feelings. Feelings is a common term but what does it mean, and what is occurring when we detect these bodily sensations? In Chapter 6, I present research from the fields of biology and psychology, as well as the work of others who have noted the feelings of their participants when discussing choices in education. For example, Chen and Bradbury's (2019) participants repeatedly used the word 'feel' when judging the quality of English childcare settings.

In my analysis of the data, I identified the spectrum of emotions expressed by the parents as ranging from an unsettledness to fear. Participants pay attention to their feelings and acknowledge their role in the decision-making process. For those parents whose child started school, the fear allayed once they had settled in. The exception to this was P15 who at our last contact said she may still remove her son and was keeping a close eye on her daughter. P20 had nothing but praise for the school her child eventually went to and was particularly pleased with their subtle introduction of compulsory testing in year 2. Finding that there were staff who shared her opinions is a continuation of **hearing the opinions of others** in the **surveying the landscape** category. This, and observing her child being happy and successful, also affected P20's feelings and fed back to alter her **attitudinal direction**.

Feelings are not fixed, and findings such as those mentioned above illustrate that changes in the circumstances modify the feelings experienced. For example, the relief expressed by P4 upon removing his daughter from school. This observation reinforces Morton's (2011) findings. Almost half of her participants were what she termed 'last resort' home educators of older children who were experiencing difficulties in school. Their decision, (most likely

driven by empathy and concern for the child's wellbeing) may have had to be taken more urgently than was the case with most of my participants.

The data from my study suggest that the internet has facilitated the discovery of like-minded individuals and instant answers to questions. It also may enable people act upon their emotions rather than having to accept their situation. Following feelings has strong links with formal and informal methods of information seeking as instinct and 'gut feeling' will motivate participants to move toward or away from certain information sources, settings and/or people.
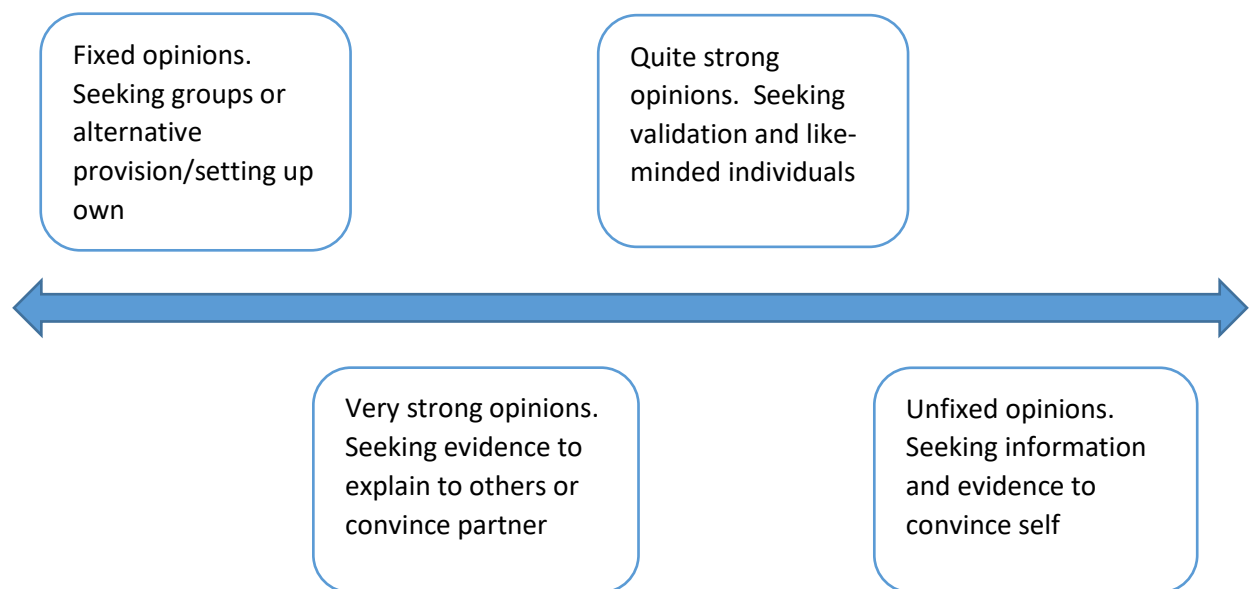
*Figure 6.4: The range of reasons for **surveying the landscape***

Participants **survey the landscape** for several reasons, some of which I have placed on the spectrum shown in figure 6.4.   P6 and P7 were making the decision alone whereas others needed to convince their partner. Some felt they knew very little and needed to look at lots of examples of home education, whereas others were already decided but wanted to see

what was available to them. Schools and alternative settings make up part of the landscape and most of the participants carried out research to determine whether to make use of them. **Surveying the landscape** may enable the discovery of solutions to barriers and challenges. Examples include legal information to ascertain what is possible and what is not, alternative jobs and even new homes in new locations. Thus, there are strong links with the final category of **negotiating obstacles.**

Category 3 - Negotiating obstacles

This category is composed of the subcategories: **accommodating work, relocating the family** and **receiving support.** Other unforeseen circumstances may arise such as illness but these are not as frequent so are only briefly mentioned.
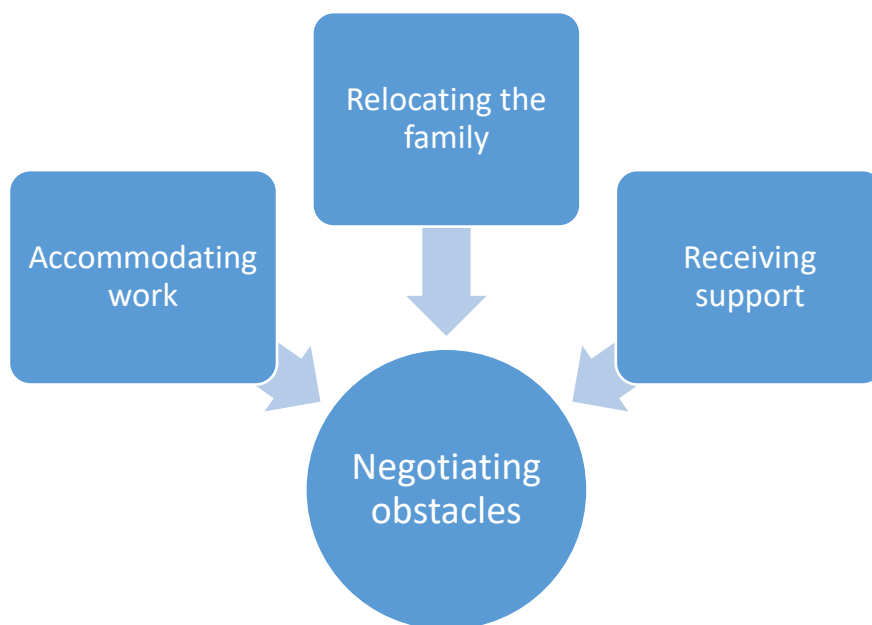

*Figure 6.5: The subcategories that make up the category of **negotiating obstacles***

Subcategory 1 - Accommodating work

Not all home educating parents can (or want to) sacrifice their career to be with their children all day. Most of the parents I spoke to had a professional career before having children. P4 and P7 were part-time students with part-time jobs so their children attended

alternative setting for some of the week. P5 had a part-time job, used the alternative school and forest-type school, and had a part-time nanny.

I asked all participants if they had considered alternative educational settings, and found that most had but found it to be too expensive. In the UK, some pre-school childcare costs were subsidised at the time of this study by a nursery voucher scheme. For those on a low income, before and after school care and holiday clubs were also part-funded. Government vouchers partly covered the Steiner kindergarten that P13's son attended at the start of the study and the alternative school's nursery attended by P7's daughter.

P1 not only moved to a different country, but also changed her career to set up the alternative setting and nursery. P8 gave up a very well-paid profession as a medical lawyer when her employers would not allow her to go part-time. She opened her own forest-type school that became her new career. Becoming freelance in her career enabled P3 to remove her daughter from the school where she was unhappy; this change in work pattern was not done to facilitate home education, but it triggered more serious discussions about making the decision. P15 ran a sling library and P13 was a dog trainer; both of these careers have flexible work patterns. Most of the mothers I interviewed whose children were not yet of school age were not working at the time of the study. P17, who was studying for her Masters, could have managed financially had she decided not to return to work after maternity leave. This was not seen as an obstacle to her and played no part in her deciding not to home educate.

These parents have negotiated their beliefs and the logistical and financial concerns of home education. This led me to consider the sacrifices we make for our children. At first, I concluded that home educating parents give up or change more things in their lives than the

majority of parents. Upon closer examination, however, I realised that these practices are commonplace and have been throughout history. Many families have a parent that stays at home or works fewer hours to spend more time with their child(ren). Not all parents in this study wished to spend every day educating their children. Some found their career to be fulfilling and needed to find a compromise. P6 stated:

> I'm a single parent, so I have to work. I couldn't do it 24/7. Even if I wasn't single I don't think I'm home school material, I would lose my mind very quickly.

She believed her solution of finding a childminder who home educates would be beneficial for others who wish to home educate and have a career. She said:

> I know a lot of home schooling parents or those who consider home schooling and struggle for money and some, not all, but some of them are really good educators and it would be great for them to have extra income and company for their kids. To educate somebody else.

P18 did not end up home educating but the statement below summarises the elements that were influencing her decision to give up her teaching position:

> When I had my first son; obviously, I was prepared for loving the child, but when I had him it was really difficult to conceive not being with him. Which then led to me, it wasn't the only factor, but led to me not going back to work…well going back to work my notice. I was a schoolteacher at the time. That was also because I was living in England but my Job was in Belfast. There were practical reasons for that too but I decided not to go for a job in London. What I would've been earning, the vast majority would've gone on childcare costs.

Since their son was six months old, P16 and her husband had incorporated their plans to home educate into their family business such as decreasing her part-time hours. She stated: *'I think it's not necessarily how it's going to affect our lifestyle; it's how our lifestyle is going to let that happen'.*

Part of P13's decision to move to an area with a Steiner Free School involved the possibility of purchasing a house with land. She spoke of wanting to set up a dog training business from home. This would not have been financially viable in her previous town.

As a result of researching home education and being off work on maternity leave with her four children, P12 changed her views on her career as a social worker. At the time of her last interview, she no longer wanted to return to her job, and was pondering the ethics of entering clients' houses without permission. Her partner was a student and was often in the house, but she said he did not participate in the children's education. Financially, she felt the family would be in a similar position if she stayed at home and that he would soon be finding work.

Not all families had the luxury of being able to decrease work hours or completely stay at home. Among other aspects, finances were an issue for flexi-schooler P9: *'My heart says get her out of there, but my head says we can't afford for that to happen*.'

Subcategory 2 - Relocating the family

Moving house to be in the catchment of a popular school has become a normal event in many people's lives. P1 moved to another country in order to educate her son how she wished. This may seem extreme but I am aware of families who move to warmer climates to enjoy a more relaxed environment for their children or emigrate, in order not to have to carry out national service.

P1 would have found it very difficult to set up an alternative school in her native country. The government there at the time had very tight controls over non-mainstream education. She moved country specifically to educate her son in a different environment. She knew home education was legal as she had worked in the UK and had a British partner. P13 moved her family across the country and believed it was worth the effort despite having to leave good friends behind. She researched the catchment area of a state run Steiner school and quickly put the house on the market in order to rent and then eventually buy there. P14 was going to move house in search of a school with more outdoor space in a smaller town or village. However, the circumstances surrounding her daughter's illness meant the family were forced to move near a hospital in the North East.

P6 turned down a position she had applied for in London to stay where she had a home educating childminder. She believed it would have been a dream job but valued the childminder and acknowledged the influence on both her and her daughter's well-being.

Interestingly, P12 did not wish to move house but was happy that since home educating, her children had begun to socialise with children from other countries:

> *Yeah it felt good because it was people that we wouldn't have met otherwise, so the mum's from Africa and the dad is from Denmark, the girls grew up in Denmark so they speak Danish as well. Really interesting people we probably wouldn't have came (sic) across. Most people from Clydebank are from Clydebank and have lived in Clydebank all their lives everybody we know is from Clydebank so it's quite nice to meet people that aren't...like just the same you know.*

P21 moved to a house with a larger garden as her children struggled to socialise when playing out or on the park. She stated that, had she not been happy with her local special

school, then she would have moved to anywhere in the country to find one that was suitable.

Subcategory 3 - Receiving support

In addition to finding support through groups and online information, home educating parents (all but one being female in this study) spoke about the support of their partner, friends, parents and siblings. Convincing their husband or partner was often the first stage that needed negotiation.

Having similar views to their partner meant that parents such as P2, P13 and P16 had an immediate ally during their decision-making period. P16 recalled the conversation:

> *I'd kind of not really thought about it when he was first here, but probably when he was 12 or 18 months or something, erm I decided I wanted to have a conversation with my husband about the future type stuff and education or whatever, and I sort of said to him "I've kind of been thinking maybe we don't want to go down the traditional route and we should do something else" and he said "yeah I was kind of thinking that too".*

In her first interview, P12 felt she had to take it more slowly than she would have liked to convince her reticent partner who thought the children would do better at school. In her last interview, she felt her style of educating was under scrutiny by her partner. If he withdrew his support, she said she would stop. P12 was providing him with evidence of the children's progress, which she otherwise would not have felt compelled to do. She worked hard to slowly convince her partner to agree to remove their first child from school and home educate their second and thought he would still prefer them to both be in school.

Her reaction below shows how she felt supported when she became upset after discussing her decision with friends:

> *What was quite interesting, was my partner has never really been that interested. And when he overheard the conversation, and that I was frustrated and I couldn't get out what I wanted to say. He said "you should've said this, this, and this". He rattled off all these things. He's obviously taken on board the things I've been saying. I do know that I must know what I'm talking about. He's not done any research, he's only picked it up off me. So that was good. He's much more rational than me, he thinks about things a lot longer and then comes to a decision, whereas I make the decision and then think.*

P5 also had to persuade her husband. She quoted him as saying '*we all have to do what we don't want to sometimes*'. She had the support of a nanny, as she felt she could not home educate '24/7'; this allowed her to continue in her part-time job. P10 laughed that her husband thought she was mad but she managed to convince him somehow.

P19 thoroughly researched home education and was determined to try it but she says the decision was 'vetoed' by her husband:

> *I think at the back of my mind I knew (husband) wouldn't agree to it, although to give him his due he did look at everything I gave him and listen to the argument and do some research of his own. But he still came to that conclusion, so I think I knew in my heart of hearts that it probably wouldn't happen for us.*

Although a small number of fathers shared the viewpoint of the mother (or in P4's case led the research into home education), P2's observation about her own and others' situations

succinctly captures the way home education usually works: *'Normally the mum's doing it every day and the dad's wanting more structure.'*

Single mother, P6 was not part of her local community as she had no friends with children nearby and no support from parents (as they lived outside of the UK). She believed that this is what led her to enrol her child in a nursery when she returned to work. She described herself as an outsider. Finding a childminder with alternative beliefs gave her the support she needed; it also enabled her child to participate in groups and socialise with another child every day. This solution suited P6's work commitments and relieved the anxiety previously felt by both mother and daughter.

P7, also a single parent, had lived independently since she was sixteen. She was accustomed to making her own decisions and her daughter's father told her to choose an educational path that she thought was best. P10 had the support of her parents, a best friend who home educated and online communities:

> *Loads of groups. I don't know how anyone did it before on Facebook...local and the neighbouring towns and generic UK ones. Absolutely crucial. Hearing peoples' experiences, worries and knowing they're the same and hearing peoples' answers is essential, and making friends and reaching out and making sure he's getting social aspect of education that is a big concern of a lot of people.*

There is a clear link here with the **formally researching** subcategory of **surveying the landscape**. P18 attempted to find groups but was unable to find suitable support in Northern Ireland '*I didn't make connections with people and I didn't want to do this thing in a very isolated way'.* She did not feel an affinity toward the parents she met because their religious and political views were not in alignment with her own.

Support also has links with the subcategory of **following feelings**. Finding that there were groups of people out there gave P4 and his ex-partner P3 '*Support for our decision*'.

Family support has a wide range of examples. P10 describes it as a '*Massive step if you don't have the support of your family as well. I was relieved when I mentioned it to my mum she was saying "that's great, I wish I'd done it"'*. P12 had supportive family members, but did not want them to look after the children as an obligation. She felt it would affect their relationship. At the opposite end of the spectrum are participants who did not discuss their choices with their parents as they felt they would not understand/agree.

P7 is an example of somebody who had very little support in terms family members but formally researched and found what she required. For two years, P7 was kept out of school due to bullying but stated that she was not home educated, just playing in the woods etc. For a few years during her childhood, P7 lived on a traveller site. She was still aware of people who currently live in traveller communities. She believed there to be a lot of variation there with some children being properly home educated and others getting nothing at all. P7 seemed very confident in how to home educate and make use of alternatives without the need for support from Facebook or websites. She found one friend through the part-time alternative setting she used and knew people that ran home education groups but did not feel the need to use them. Her psychology degree (which included child development units) and work in a behavioural school seemed to help give her confidence in her decision. She stated: '*I'm quite used to not being part of the norm and not complying'*.

P7 had financial support as she was in receipt of nursery vouchers (which paid for the educational setting as it was classified as childcare). She was unsure for how long this

financial support would be available. This is an example of making some use of the system, but only when it does not interfere with ideological beliefs.

P21 tried very hard to gain financial support from her LA. She knew the youngest two children were very unhappy in primary school and was often having to leave work to collect her middle son when he was in crisis. After two happy years with the same teacher, he spent the majority of year 6 in a den behind a bookcase in the corridor as the large class he was in caused him so much anxiety.

> So I've always said that I would love to home educate it, but we couldn't do it because we couldn't afford to go down to one wage basically. And I looked into the fact that they all had funding for 25 hours plus per week on a one-to-one at school and could we convert any of that into funding, but the council won't do that-even though I'm a qualified teacher. They won't give me any of the EHCP money.

The financial support of her husband after his promotions at work enabled her to leave her full time job as a secondary school teacher of children on the autistic spectrum.

Barriers that obstruct the path to the type of education desired by parents may be easier to overcome if support is available (e.g. financial support enabling participants to use alternative settings). However, despite support making some choices easier, the findings suggest that receiving the physical and/or moral support of others played a minor role in the decision-making process, as many with strong anti-school attitudes go ahead without any assistance at all. The exception to this being that if the father of the child did not agree with the decision then the mother would not proceed (or in the case of P3 and P4 where the father was the one who made the suggestion and the mother agreed). One husband in the study did not permit his wife to take the decision to home educate and two of the mothers took time to convince their reticent partner.

This section provides answers to emergent research question 3: What barriers do parents face in implementing their choice and how do they overcome them?
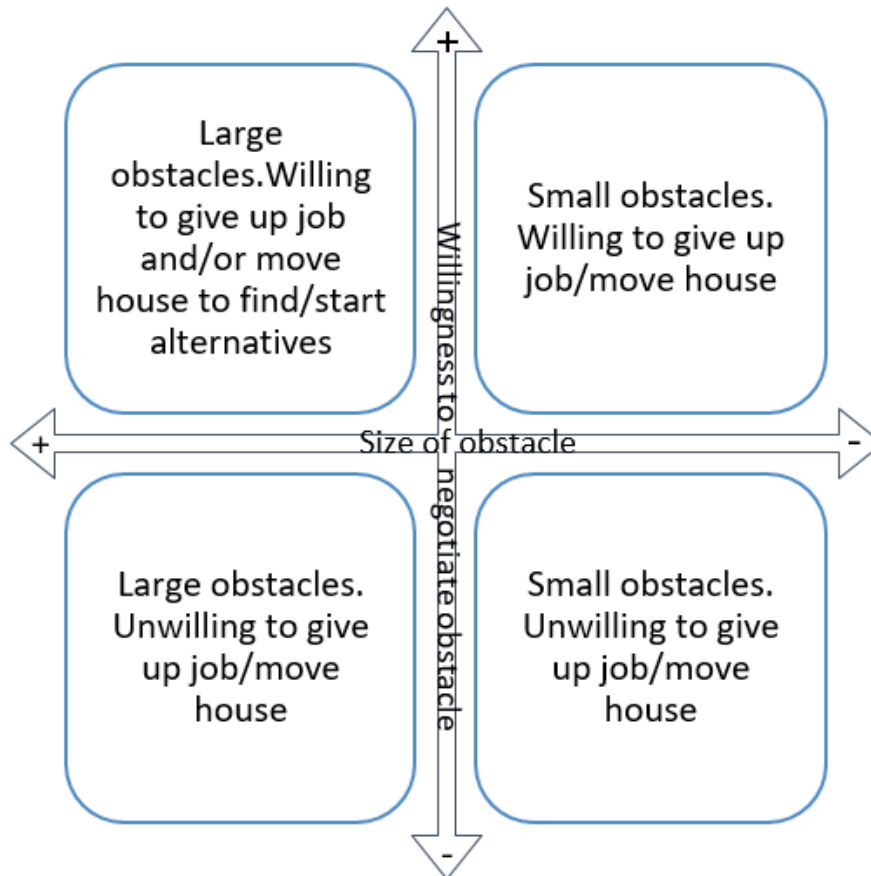
Figure 6.6: Exploring dimensions of *negotiating obstacles*

The above diagram represents the range of obstacle size (horizontal axis) and the willingness to overcome them (vertical axis).

The data show that participants who decided not to home educate encountered similar obstacles to those who went ahead with it. It is not the size of the obstacle that determines whether it can be negotiated, but the strength of the attitude of the parent as this provides the willingness to give up or change other aspects of their lives. For example, P9's mother-in-law requiring care deterred her after a year of flexi-schooling (until compulsory school

age) and meant that they could not move to find a school that allowed permanent flexi-schooling. In contrast, P14's baby being critically ill had the opposite effect in that she valued family time together even more.

Some participants had the support of friends and family but others did not request help from anybody except their partner. Two of the mothers had no partner involved at all. Convincing their partner was an early stage needing negotiation for most, and P19 and P12 specifically researched home education to gain the support of their partners. P19 was disappointed that she did not succeed. In her final interview, P12 stated that she would have to give up home education if her partner felt the children were not reaching good academic standards. She was providing him with evidence in folders despite not believing this is necessary for the children's progress. My findings confirm Morton's (2011) potential reasons for giving up home education such as inability to provide suitable education and ill health. However, some of my participants had stopped home educating or decided against it therefore these reasons were not just potential, but actual reasons. Interestingly, echoing my participant, P19, Morton also used the term 'veto' from the father as a reason for stopping (Morton, 2011:284).

Some of the parents in this study negotiated massive obstacles. P1 moved to a new country to alternatively educate in the UK. She held the strongest anti-school attitude observed in the data, believing that schools should be shut down and replaced by something 'more organic'. The relative ease of setting up an alternative education environment in the UK was the sole reason for her move. P8 provided sessions similar to forest schooling for her children's primary school one day a week in an area of woodland she had purchased with others. She retrained to teach forest school after leaving a financially rewarding high-status career. P8 gave her time freely until the head teacher refused to let her children take an

extra day out of school to spend in the woods. Her attempt to engage with mainstream

schooling whilst providing an alternative part-time may have influenced the attitudes of the

school staff and other parents; however, the school's traditional outlook and refusal to

accommodate her requests for more time meant she withdrew her children completely.

P13 moved her family across the country to gain a place at a state-funded Steiner school

and she felt some locals were concerned that the demand for housing from non-locals might

be a source of animosity in the town. Parents moving to a new area to attend a school with

a non-mainstream approach/ideology were also present Hope's (2010) study.

The obstacles faced by most of the participants in this study were relatively easy to

negotiate compared to those who reside in countries where home education is not

permitted, for example those in the literature that had relocated from Germany to escape

prosecution (Francis-Pape and Hall, 2008). A similar example to P13, was a participant in M.

Fortune-Wood's (2006) home education research who gave up their business and sold their

house to educate their SEN child themselves. The example of this in the present study is

P13's case, although she could re-establish her dog training/walking/sitting business at the

new location and her husband's work was unaffected.

11 out of my 21 participants were working either full or part-time (two others were on

maternity leave and had the possibility of returning to work). The father I interviewed was a

part-time student who also worked. A large factor in predicting home education in the USA

is having at least one parent at home according to Isenberg (2007). Additionally, having

another child under three at home increases the likelihood of home educating by 1.2%. My

findings differ to this in that having to accommodate work was not seen as an obstacle to

those with very strong attitudes. For example, P6 was determined to continue in her career

as a full-time academic so found a childminder who home educated. This is a very good

example of no obstacle being unsurmountable. A contrast to literature that focussed on purely home educating families was that, in my study, a number of the mothers (and the father interviewed) still held jobs and/or studied. Morton's (2011) participants tended to consider motherhood as their full-time role but some would have liked their child to be away from them for a small amount of the week. P21 very much enjoyed her career as a teacher but the stress of coping with the children's emotional needs led to her decreasing her hours and ultimately making the decision to leave her job. Her husband gaining pay rises, therefore removing the financial barrier, facilitated this choice. The family still did not become committed home educators until the schools closed due to Covid-19. This example demonstrates that the parents maintained their pro-school stance up until all obstacles were removed and they had seen the benefits of home educating their children first-hand. P18 wanted to undertake a PhD, and although time would have permitted her to home educate, she cited the lack of like-minded support in Northern Ireland being a factor and admitted '*I think I'd still be interested in home education if the structural factors were all right, I didn't have enough money and all that*'. Her anti-school attitudes were not strong enough to motivate her to continue regardless. She surveyed the local landscape to find a non-segregated school with a mixed social demographic near her university.

The discovery of alternative solutions in the present study allowed some of the parents to continue in their careers. The data suggest that there is a new type of alternative educator emerging, who are able to adapt their work around home education. This is a significant finding and may be indicative of the variation in types of parent who are starting to turn their backs on mainstream schooling. In the future, there may also be novel solutions such as childminders who become home educators for others, as in the case of P6. The spread of

ideas and solutions via forums and social media is likely to facilitate the uptake of these types of solutions.

Relationships between the categories
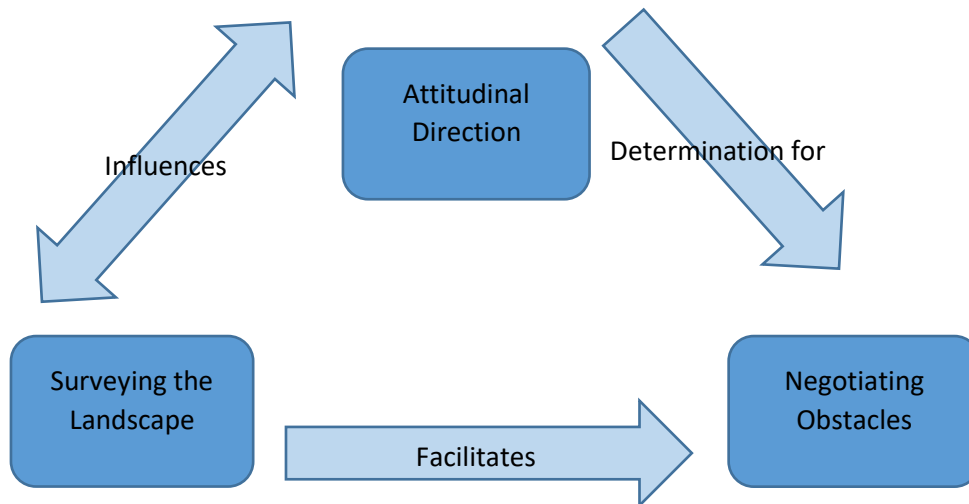
Figure 6.7: Relationships between the three categories

The size of an obstacle, and whether it can be overcome depends very much on the **attitudinal direction** of a parent. There are very strong links with the **surveying the landscape** category because finding like-minded people, success stories about home education and negative stories about school strengthens their pre-existing attitudes. **Surveying the landscape** also aids in the negotiation of obstacles as parents can find alternative settings, answers to legal questions and advice about educating their child. A support network may be found (either online or face-to-face groups). Even without **surveying the** external **landscape** the parents may have enough determination **to negotiate the obstacles** as their anti-school attitudes and **surveying their** internal **landscape** of feelings are enough to drive them forward. The arrow between **attitudinal direction** and **surveying the landscape** is double-headed due to the reinforcing effect that finding

information has in strengthening attitudes. Very occasionally, as in the instance of P20, the information gathered leads to a change in opinion for example about the pressure of SATs. Mostly though, the surveying stage leads to finding others who feel the same thus increasing the strength of the attitude.

Tunnelling between

This subcategory is not a component of the main grounded theory because it does not constitute part of the decision-making journey. Once parents have chosen their child's path however, many wish to keep their child's options open with regard to attending school or university in the future, or decide to make use of various aspects of 'the system'. In this section, I provide instances of parents **tunnelling between** different grooves in the educational landscape.

The most obvious example of **tunnelling between** is that around half of the participants wished to flexi-school but not all schools agreed to parents' requests. At the time of this study, the decision to allow flexi-schooling was entirely up to the discretion of the head teacher, but children could attend part-time until the child reached compulsory school age (CSA). P9 was considering home education while her child was flexi-schooling in reception year. She believed the blend of both would facilitate her child to be able integrate fully in society.

> *I wouldn't want to mess up her chances of being part of the world as it is by doing that. Flexi-schooling appeals to me more as she still has time at home to learn naturally follow her interests and do what she loves but still go to school so she will still get GCSEs etc. and be able to be whatever she wants to be.*

The school allowed P15 to flexi-school her daughter. She had been home educating, but her daughter asked to go to school for increasing numbers of days each year, as the home education groups they attended did not have any girls of her age. She wished to do the same with her son but the new head teacher did not permit flexi-schooling beyond CSA. Her eldest child chose to go for increasing numbers of days until full-time.

P8 did not intend for the alternative school she opened to operate all week in the beginning. Only flexi-schooled children attended at the start and she was happy to integrate it with mainstream school for the other four days of the week. P8 voluntarily took other classes from her children's school there for forest activity sessions, and in doing so she was supporting the mainstream school and they were supporting her children in allowing them to do both. When she requested that her daughters take two days off per week instead of just one (to be in the outdoor environment more), the head teacher refused so she decided to withdraw her children from the school and take full responsibility for their education. At the time of our last contact, P8's children were attending a fee-paying traditional independent high school. They are an example of successfully **tunnelling between** as they were reportedly performing well in all aspects of their schooling.

The alternative settings established by P1 and P8 were registered with Ofsted as early years providers. This legitimised their settings and potentially aided in constructing them as alternative rather than unregistered or illegal schools. The proprietors of both were careful to maintain their status as part-time and knew the maximum numbers of children/hours that would push them into having to register as independent schools. By utilising the government's inspection process, they had in effect raised the status of their settings. Some parents might be happy to send their child to an unmonitored provider, but others are likely

to feel reassured that staff undergo checks and the premises are safe. This is an example of **tunnelling between** as the parents desire the freedom from bureaucracy but appreciate the purpose of government-mandated procedures in this context.

There are many other examples of **tunnelling between** types of provision or making use of the formal system when required. For example, P3 and P4 employed a tutor for maths and English to provide them with reassurance that their daughter was progressing appropriately. P2 and P5 used reading and/or maths software and P7 was dipping in and out of the national curriculum feeling reassured that it was there if needed. P12 gained reassurance that her children could perform at the level expected in schools by utilising laminated sheets with spellings etc. provided by her teacher sister. A very clear example of making use of the system in their own way is P13 utilising a state funded Steiner school. This school provided the balance of alternative ideologies and pedagogies required but with the knowledge that the children would still be covered by the gaze of the government and will still gain traditional qualifications which permit access to further and higher education courses.

A slightly different yet still important example of **tunnelling between** is in P11 who chose to flexi-school her son in order to teach him her first language. This allowed the child to access the *groove* of his culture, wider family and community abroad.

Tunnelling between is a significant finding in the data and may be a feature of the wider home educating population. Some parents would like to move freely between home and different types of educational setting. They do not wish to fully leave mainstream education, and many would have liked to flexi-school or for the child to enrol in school at a later date. This transition is not always smooth however as children are not accustomed to certain school routines and procedures. An example of this is shown in the literature where

young people interviewed by Nelson (2013) believed that not understanding how to use the expected exam technique was an issue when re-entering the system (as teachers train children how to meet criteria and structure answers etc. from an early age). P8 believed that her children adapted well to a private high school after their primary education in the woods because they were old enough to understood why teachers used rewards and sanctions and were not psychologically affected by the pressure to perform (as they had been whilst in school).

Summary

In this chapter, I presented findings to illustrate the properties of the three categories that make up the participants' journey or **stepping out of the system?** I demonstrated the range of attitudes, information seeking methods and barriers faced by parents. I examined the categories and subcategories of my grounded theory and compared my findings to those of others. There were similarities with other studies in that not all parents had anti-school attitudes and that many mentioned parenting style being associated with their interest in home education. In summary, disapproving comments from parents about the education system from my findings included that it squashes creativity and that it is a one size fits all approach. The parents do not apportion blame on the teachers, but instead to the curriculum and large class sizes. The participants see their children as unique and may believe the pace and style of learning available in schools to be unsuitable. Those parents with an interest in child development are certain that learning from life is a superior method however, they often use reading schemes and maths sites or extra tuition in the core subjects of numeracy and literacy. Akin to the priorities of mainstream schools, I suggest

that they are prioritising these core subjects; providing a safety net for when the child has to re-enter the system.

Parents used a variety of methods to investigate schools/alternatives and home education and an affective dimension was noted in response to many of these. I found feelings to be an important driver in the decision-making process as participants mentioned emotions in both the **attitudinal direction** and **surveying the landscape** categories. Next, I identified barriers such as finances and home location. These were overcome in the families with strong attitudes; with the exception being if the child's father did not approve of the decision. Finally, I developed the concept that parents wish to **tunnel between** types of provision and for their child to retain the possibility of re-entering mainstream education at some point. Either this, or there is a realisation that the child will require some traditional qualifications in order to participate in society and have access to the full range of careers. In the next chapter, I present literature from a review that I carried out in parallel with the data analysis. As I constructed categories, I pursued literature that focused on the emerging themes. I discovered most of the literature after I had determined the relationships between the categories. I discuss the findings in light of the literature in Chapter 6 and present the grounded theory in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6: Return to the literature through the lens of **Stepping out of the System**

Introduction

In Chapter 3, I explained how, in most Grounded Theory studies, researchers delay a full

literature review until the data have been analysed and the theory is starting to develop.

This approach makes sense to me as the study may change direction due to theoretical

sampling, and papers thought to be useful at the start often end up being disregarded. The

study focusses on what is important to the participants and, by consulting it retrospectively,

the literature does not stray far from the data. Thornberg (2012) suggests that Grounded

Theory researchers should pursue the literature in the same way that we pursue

participants i.e. by theoretically sampling.   This is an exciting but daunting prospect, as the

data lead in unexpected directions and, in some cases, into other academic disciplines. Like

my participants, I did not know at the start where this journey would lead.

In this chapter, I present prior research that deepened my understanding of the categories

formed during my analysis of the data. I had to delete many interesting sources from this

chapter, as the landscape of educational choice is vast. Searching for literature about

attitudes, emotions and decision-making led me down a rabbit hole that took me away from

parents, and into the realm of the psychology behind phenomena as diverse as consumer

choice and voting preference. I briefly introduce a biological account of emotions, as it links

to the participants in this and other studies mentioning their 'gut feelings' and instincts, but

I did not wish to stray too far into that field. My interest in reading about how the internet

often provides users with biased information yielded a similarly varied inter-disciplinary

range of articles. I provide a short historical account of how attitudes to parenting have

changed in recent years as the data suggest that parenting style is an influence in the early

stages of educational decision-making. Attitudes to learning seem to have similar origins in that home educators often prefer child-led pedagogies (see Chapter 2).

In order to maintain relevance, I tried to stay close to the categories and subcategories constructed in my grounded theory; however, the section headings differ from those in the findings as the literature review delves deeper into some areas such as conceptualising what attitudes, feelings and emotions are.

The surveying the landscape category required me to investigate parental decision-making, school league tables and Ofsted reports as these were mentioned by participants. I also researched the introduction of free schools, as some of these follow the teaching methods of Steiner and Montessori and one parent chose to move gain a place at a free school. Although the majority of this type of alternative school are fee-paying, some are now state funded which removes the obstacle of financial considerations. The final section on **negotiating obstacles** is comparatively short because most of the obstacles mentioned by the participants are easy to explain and are encountered by parents generally, not just those wishing to find alternative solutions. Much of the literature in this chapter focusses on empirical studies as I integrate my grounded theory with wider sociological theories in Chapter 7.

Attitudinal direction

In Chapter 5 of this thesis, I provide data to show that attitudes to school environment, parenting and learning are the driving force behind the exploration of alternative educational solutions. Those parents with strongly negative attitudes to school were highly motivated and made huge sacrifices in the pursuit of their goal.

There are many definitions of what an attitude is, each differing very subtly. For example, Maio and Haddock (2010) state that an attitude is an 'overall evaluation of an object based on cognitive, affective and behavioural information' (2010:4) (for an account of how definitions have changed over the past century see Faizo, 2007). To summarise very briefly, the cognitive element is the thoughts and beliefs the individual has about the object; affective information is their emotional response and any feelings triggered; and behavioural information is how they have behaved toward the object previously. The simplest way to phrase this is 'evaluative knowledge represented in memory' (Faizo, 2007:621).

> *It can stem from emotional reactions that the attitude object evokes, as in the case of conditioned emotional responses. It can be based on one's past behaviors and experiences with the object. Or, it can also be based on some combination of these potential sources of evaluative information* (Faizo, 2007).

In the present study, the attitude object would be school; however, my findings and those of others (e.g. Kraftl 2013a & b) demonstrate that not all parents have negative memories of school

As far back as 1956, Smith et al. proposed that attitudes have three major functions: object appraisal (to deduce whether something is harmful or beneficial), social adjustment (to keep us near people we like and away from people we dislike) and externalisation (attitudes that protect our self-esteem such as disliking something we are not good at). All three of these reasons potentially play a role in educational decision-making. Those who had a poor experience of school may have appraised it as harmful; those that are seeking a certain type of person to meet in groups/schools may be partaking in social adjustment and finally; those

who did not do well at school may be hoping to avoid their child suffering from damage to their self-esteem. Attitudes are more strongly held when an individual has direct experience of an object as the memories are easily accessible (Faizo and Zanna, 1981 cited in Millar and Millar, 1996).

> *It is presumably characteristic of educational attitudes that they entail a great deal of personal memories and feelings, which give them particular evaluative consistency, ego-involvement, and a feeling of singularity* (Räty, 2011;348).

Attitudes can differ in strength and valance; in my grounded theory, I use the term direction instead of valance because it is associated with moving toward or away from the object. The attitudes that stood out in this study were about the state, schools, parenting and learning.

Attitudes to the role of the state

As the core category found in the data was the process of attempting to **step out of the system**, this section will address the role of the state in family life. In the UK, the family has transitioned from a private institution to becoming more visible to agencies. For example, according to Wyness (2014) social services are now less likely to give parents the benefit of the doubt in welfare cases. The child has moved from a position of being 'owned' by the parent into a third space between parents and professionals with a voice of their own. This transition from a focus on the family to the child is evident in international policies published in the last 30 years and given legal standing with the UN convention on the rights of the child (Wyness, 2014). Conroy (2010) asserts that there is now a surveillance culture that has 'expanded from mainstream institutions to voluntary organisations and thence breached even the walls of the family' (2010: 327). A counter argument would be that this

monitoring has been the case for decades but choice is given on how to respond to the data. For example, Public Health England co-ordinate a weight and height health check for children aged 4/5 and 10/11 (as they enter and leave primary school). Those above the 0.96 or below the 0.4 centile are at serious risk of ill health yet the documents only 'recommend' that local authorities have a duty of care to trigger agencies such as GPs and dieticians to intervene (Public Health England, 2019). Mostly, it seems that the guidelines are to send letters home to parents of children above or below the healthy range. This strategy places a lot of trust in parents to modify their child's diet and expects that teachers are able to judge by eye and report to social services any children they believe are being deprived of food. The presence of this type of surveillance in schools is the argument of some opponents of home education and the focus of newspaper reports about neglect and abuse cited in Chapters 1 and 2.

In addition to assessing weight and some aspects of health, English children now undertake 'school readiness' assessments. However, setting early years goals has become a concern for some researchers and this has been taken up by the press with stories of nursery teachers pushing very young children to learn numbers and more recently, phonics in preparation for their reception year assessment (Jarvis, 2018). Roberts-Holmes (2015) claims that the government focus on assessment and goals in early years has disrupted what should be a time dedicated to play. The assessment criteria introduced in 2013 were so difficult to achieve that only 49% of children reached the required 'expected level of development', for those born in Summer months it was just 38% (compared with 60% born in Autumn months) (DfE, 2013). As teachers adapted to the new criteria, they began to follow what Roberts-Holmes (2015) terms 'a data driven pedagogy'. As will be shown in the data, these sorts of changes have influenced parental attitudes to the school system as

opinions transfer from the media, teacher friends or other people's children. The presence

of Facebook groups dedicated to Summer-born children illustrate the pervasiveness of these

types of report and my data demonstrate a parental awareness of the potential

disadvantages of being the youngest in the class. This section overlaps with the influences

on attitudes to schools in the next section.

Responding to concerns that some schools are gaming the system and providing too narrow

a curriculum, a new inspection framework (Ofsted, 2019) shifted the focus away from

internal performance data. In an article published by *The Times Education Supplement*

(Roberts, 2018), Matthew Purves, Ofsted's deputy director for schools stated:

> *Outcomes really matter, and the impact of a good curriculum, well-taught, is that*
>
> *pupils will achieve great outcomes. They'll gain qualifications that they can take into*
>
> *the next stage of life. But in all of this, data should not be the only thing we look at.*
>
> *And data should not be king* (Roberts, 2018 online no page no.)*.*

This awareness of the dangers of schools focussing on data from a government body is a

positive move in my view. Discourses in the press regarding the rigorous testing culture in

schools trickle down to parents, an example being the 2016 *New Statesman* report on the

Children's World Survey that ranked England as 14th out of 15 for child happiness. The only

country ranked lower was South Korea, which has similarly frequent testing (Wigmore,

2016).

Britain and Ireland are unusual in that formal instruction begins at the age of four (O'Connor

and Angus, 2012). An appreciation of the delayed start to education in Scandinavian

countries was a feature of my data so I researched why this might be the case. Finland's

education system is often lauded as a successful one with consistently high PISA rankings

which Sahlberg (2006) attributes to more collaboration than competition and a fear-free

culture of learning that encourages risk taking amongst pupils and teachers. The teachers in

Finland all hold Master's Degrees and must engage in continued professional development.

This leads to a highly respected workforce and a desirable career. The reasons for Finland's

school climate differing so much from that of England's are summarised in the quote below:

> *Finnish schools are almost totally test-free. The only compulsory standardized test is*
>
> *the high school exit examination, taken at age 18. The learning environment is*
>
> *therefore safe and free from fear and anxiety often caused by failing in tests. External*
>
> *review of teachers' performance was abolished in early 1990s. Thus, as most Finnish*
>
> *teachers will tell you, they are free to focus on developing understanding, fostering*
>
> *an interest in learning and cultivating open trust-based relationships between*
>
> *teachers and students* (Sahlberg, 2006:282).

Geographers, Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2013) assert that pressure to perform in

international educational comparison tests is causing governments to intervene in family

life. The expectation that parents (mainly mothers) will support their child's learning at

home has been increased in recent years and is placing strain on those who work. The

authors believe this 'restructuring' of education is contributing to a class and gender divide.

Hutchinson (2012) has also highlighted the physical and emotional burden felt by mothers in

carrying out the tasks associated with their child's schooling.

Home educating parents express a variety of opinions on the role of the state. As

introduced in Chapter 2, Morton (2010) divided her home educating participants into three

categories: natural, social and last resort. The 'natural' parents wanted to enjoy time with their children and rejected 'conventional social structures and conformity to what they saw as a tyrannical system' (Morton, 2010:47). This is the group of parents who would be perceived as being most anti-state. In his paper on the normalisation of home schooling in the USA, Mitchell Stevens (2001) claims that:

> *First, we should expect that home education will be adopted initially by households at the margins of mainstream culture. Early in the course of its normalisation, home education is deviant activity, and it will appeal initially to those who already are comfortable with living unconventionally* (Stevens, 2001:97).

Stevens (2001) posits that the normalisation of home education in the USA is enabling other countries to transition more easily by borrowing pedagogical ideas and organisation models. He concludes that home education as a legitimate choice means it is congruent with the neoliberal market economy in that parents are now consumers of education. This means the groups are no longer positioned as outsiders or different because of their choice to home educate.

Whilst normalisation may be occurring for some groups of home educators, the 'natural' type identified by Morton (2010) were attempting to avoid state intervention in all aspects of their lives (see Chapter 2 for details on each group):

> *Home education was therefore a mechanism which allowed parents to protect their children from negative state structures and preserve their innocence* (Morton 2010:49).

Morton (2010) concluded that some of the anti-system phrases used by participants in her study were learnt elsewhere and possibly relayed to parents by activists e.g. at a home education camp. She believed collective justification was occurring despite the parents not having read works by the original authors.

> *…these parents constructed conventional schools as an expression of an oppressive and controlling state using neo-Marxist discourses, describing schools as moulding workers and compliant individuals. Without showing any knowledge of having read such works, many of the Natural parents that I talked to espoused a view of the state and of schooling which echoed Bowles and Gintis' (1976) Correspondence Theory and Althusser's (1972) concepts of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses* Morton, 2011:134).

The parents in Morton's study who gave social reasons for home educating felt that they were responsible for every aspect of the child's upbringing and that this should not be the role of the state. These parents were concerned about the influence of other children that might occur in a mainstream school, not necessarily by bullying but exposure to different values. This echoes the reasons for traveller parents removing their children from school which I discuss later in the chapter (Bhopal and Myers, 2016).

Research into home educating families is limited and usually about those who have deliberated over the decision and prepared themselves as facilitators of learning. The categories Lees (2011) used to describe how parents found out about home education were not all defined in a positive light. As I explained in Chapter 1, she labelled some parents as giving 'superficial', 'negative' and 'excuse' explanations for their discovery of home education. Lees (2011) is of the opinion that the reasons parents give for home educating

could be employed by LA inspectors to determine which parents are not providing an effective education or even provide a vetting system which may allay some of the government concerns surrounding children being at risk. The role of the state in this case may be of vital need if the children are in danger or are being denied of their right to an education.

Jackson and Scott (1999, cited in Pain, 2006) believe that we live in a society with heightened parental risk awareness, but also a nostalgia for childhoods in which we played out safely. Furedi (2001) proposes that society's heightened anxiety about risk has been exacerbated by a decrease in community parenting and support. Gone are the days when you could tell somebody else's child off. This leads us to question whose responsibility is the development of the child? Warnick (2014) believes that it is up to the parent as long as they do not stunt development so that the child fails to become autonomous. This, however takes us back to the argument that authorities will not be aware of the children that need intervention unless there is a method of surveillance.

Parents and children should have a right to make choices about education but why is the state so interested? To answer this, I return to the American researcher, Robert Kunzman:

> *Finally, the state also has an interest in the education of its citizens. Education necessary to sustain democracy cannot be neutral or indifferent toward the value of democracy or the importance of participation in its ongoing maintenance. Democracy depends upon the cultivation of a critical mass of citizens who value and – at least to some degree – participate in shared decision-making* (Kunzman, 2009:317).

The perspective stated above is that educated citizens can play a part in shaping future decisions as part of the democratic process. By home educating, parents are largely unhindered in making personal educational choices. Participating on school committees and governing bodies may lead to mainstream educating parents feeling valued and making a contribution. In fact, having a voice in policymaking and regulation of home education was one of the Badman review recommendations (2009:21). He referred to Tasmania as an example of self-regulation and suggested that local authorities could facilitate parents sharing ideas and good practice. He called this a 'consultative forum' and listed examples of local authorities that do something similar or hold drop-in sessions etc. A problem he saw with English home educating groups was that there was no clear representative. As stated earlier, there are many types of home educator so this would not be possible in the UK. Additionally, for some, the independence and unregulated nature of home education seems to be part of its appeal hence my study's title **Stepping out of the System?**

Influences on attitudes to schools

As the first subcategory of the grounded theory is called attitudes to schools, I present literature in this section to explore factors that influence this. For those of us raised in a country where mainstream education is almost universal, it is difficult to imagine that not all cultures have school as part of their tradition. For example, according to Beck (2001), it is a relatively recent addition in rural communities where in the past children would be required to work on the farm at set times of the year. Although uncommon in the general population of Norway, home education and part-time school attendance have been historically prevalent in isolated communities. In the UK, traveller communities often train youngsters to participate in family businesses and value practical skills over academic qualifications.

The children are considered adults at the age of around 14 (Bhopal and Myers, 2016).

Bhophal and Myers' research findings suggest that this is why traveller children may attend

primary school but often do not complete secondary education with comments justifying

this such as 'It's just what we do' (2016:11). Many of the parents interviewed had not been

to school for very long themselves, and neither had the grandparents. An alternative

viewpoint is that maladaptive coping strategies to racist bullying may be causing traveller

children to be excluded or leave school; feeling unwelcome they either turn to fight or flight

(Derrington, 2007). Levinson (2007) observed that traveller children interacted with adults

in a different way, played differently and some would even wander from classroom to

classroom. The percentage of gypsy/Roma children reaching the 'good level of

development' in early years in 2013 was just 16%, this was the lowest of any ethnic group

(DfE, 2013).

O'Hanlon and Holmes (2004) (cited in Bhopal and Myers, 2016) found that traveller families

feared their cultural traditions would be lost as the child progresses through mainstream

education, in particular, their morals and views on alcohol and drug taking. A traveller

community will have different goals and norms, and they will naturally feel an affinity with

those with whom they feel belonging, I return to this in the section on seeking people like us

in the **surveying the landscape** category.

Aurini and Davies' (2005) Canadian paper on home schooling and private education included

a mother who regarded her daughter as being too precious and innocent for school. She

feared that the child would be 'contaminated'. This terminology echoes that used in a study

in which U.S. home educators referred to disease-type metaphors in that their children

might 'catch' something from the other children (Stevens, 2001 cited in Apple, 2006). Reay

(2015) found that some of her middle-class participants had 'fears that their children might be 'sucked in', swallowed up by the 'bad' children' (2015:17). These types of comments, in Reay's opinion, reinforce the idea that middle class parents have a revulsion or contempt of the working class and even 'anxiety about being contaminated by poverty and lack' (2015:20).

Very little research exists about parental memories of education and how these can be activated when their child starts school (Räty, 2011). Research into parental attitudes about schooling tend to focus on class difference, for example, the hidden injuries often inflicted on working class pupils that can lead to a sense of resentment of middle-class professionals later in life (Gorman, 1998). Those that resist class injuries may conform to the ideology of meritocracy in that hard work can pay off or that skilled labour is as valuable as academic qualifications. Middle class parents tend to have fond memories of school and high aspirations for their children e.g. expecting college attendance and professional careers (Gorman, 1998). Negative memories of school can be a motivator to elicit change for example in the desire to help children prepare for tests if the parents did not perform well in their childhood (Räty, 2011). In Räty's (2011) longitudinal study, gender seemed to be a factor; in that the fathers who were vocationally educated and had poor memories of school seemed to view their children's schooling in a more negative light. The mothers' memories did not seem to affect their perception of their child's school to such an extent.

Crozier et al. (2008) explored the way middle class parents manage their anxieties about sending their children to comprehensive school. The fact that they have the resources to provide extracurricular activities and academic tuition, plus the greater likelihood that their children occupy the higher sets seems to counteract some of the concerns that the school is a place where 'other' types of children go who are disinterested in learning and have less

acceptable attitudes, language and behaviour. The fact that they can, at any time, **step out**

of the system if things are not going well (e.g. by home educating, paying for private tuition

or moving schools) is also a factor. Higher income families have the finances available to

provide an alternative that working class families could not. Sending their children to a

comprehensive school is seen by middle class parents in Crozier et al.'s (2008) study as risky,

but it is manageable. They are also able to exert some degree of control e.g. by writing

complaints to the head, challenging the decisions of teachers or being on the board of

governors etc. (Crozier et al., 2008, Gorman, 1998). Their liberal political stance leads them

to support state education generally but only in schools where there are enough similarly

minded parents (Crozier et al., 2008).   This is indicative of the desire for their children to be

amongst others who have experienced a similar parenting style.

The desire for children to be amongst peers who have like-minded parents is not purely a

class issue (the parents in the present study came from all manner of backgrounds). Parents

also value similar discipline styles to their own and may feel schools do not support their

views. One of the two Muslim case study families interviewed by Myers and Bhopal (2018)

were using a non-mainstream community school that the father believed supported their

culture. He chose this type of school in order to protect his children and stated:

> *In the schools it's always a story about respecting all religions. Respecting everybody.*
>
> *But instead they end up respecting nobody. They actually don't mind the children*
>
> *being rude or violent. They don't mind if a black kid beats up my girl or white girls*
>
> *swear at my daughter. That's fine* (Myers and Bhopal, 2018:220).

Gender and race stereotypes are a concern for some home educating parents. For example,

a mother of four boys who felt that they needed to be active and outdoors before they

could sit down and learn, and a parent of an African American girl who believed her

daughter would not be encouraged to be assertive and academic in a mainstream school (Lois, 2009). These examples illustrate a common opinion that home educators tend to state that their child is different or that school provides a 'one- size-fits-all' approach that does not celebrate differences.

An alternative perspective on difference is provided by a study of black home educators in the USA. The researchers found that 19 of the 24 families interviewed decided to educate at home to avoid the problem of segregation and racial stereotypes. Many black families believed schools to be a destructive rather than a supportive learning environment (Fields-Smith and Williams, 2009).

> *Black families sought home schooling as a refuge from the subtle, yet subvert messages of racism that they perceived would be directed at their children within the more traditional forms of schooling* (2009:379).

I return to the concept of seeking refuge in Chapter 7, as this is a term that I feel encompasses the sense of relief and comfort experienced when parents and children escape the setting that is causing them harm. In Puga's (2019) Philadelphia based study, one African-American participant declared that she home educated as a protest after repeatedly experiencing racism in the school system. Her journey is described as moving from a position of marginalisation to liberation.

The title of the grounded theory, **Stepping out of the system?** was inspired by a recurring theme in my data that echoes that of other studies, in that faults with the school system are frequently mentioned by parents 'be it structural, social or at an individual level' (Morton, 2010:54).

A criticism of home educators reported by Lois (2009) was that they held beliefs that they could teach better than school teachers, exemplifying another manifestation of a negative attitude to schools. Her participants were used to justifying their decision with answers such as that their children were gifted and ahead of the rest, or delayed and would fall behind. One stated that teachers might be experts in child development, but that she was the 'Harry expert' (Lois, 2009:213). Warnick (2014) agrees that parents know the child best but argues that education requires a connection of the interests of the child to the wider world and knowledge of pedagogies. A qualified teacher develops these skills through training and experience.

Non- home educating parents also publicly express dislike of the intensive testing culture that is emerging in the UK. In May 2016, 45,000 parents signed a petition against the maths and English assessments (SATs) for 6/7-year-olds and many did not send their children to school on the day of the tests (Pells, 2016). Messages about the harm caused by high-stakes testing are rippling into the mainstream press via teaching unions and even politicians. An example being an article in the *Daily Mail* newspaper with the headline: 'SATs tests 'robbing children of their human rights and damaging education', warns teaching union' after a keynote speech by the leader of the National Union of Teachers at their annual conference (Clark, 2010). The speech conveyed the findings of a Commons School Select Committee meeting of MPs. Similar findings of a select committee in 2017 warned of the consequences of high stakes testing, not only because the teaching becomes focussed on those subjects at the cost of others but, arguably more importantly, due to the impact on staff and pupil wellbeing. The report identified that many teachers claimed to be 'teaching to the test' (Parliament.uk*, 2017:25).* The authors also believed there to be too much of a focus on

English and maths teaching at the expense of the broader curriculum and that there were concerns regarding stress levels of both staff and pupils.

The Government should assess the impact of changes to curriculum and standards on teacher and pupil wellbeing before they are introduced and publish plans to avoid such negative consequences (Parliament.uk, 2017:25).

Formal tests are imposed on English children at a young age, for example the phonics screening test introduced for all reception children in 2012. In 2013 only 58% of children reached the expected standard but this number increased to 82% by 2018 (DfE, 2019b). This year on year increase is possibly a reflection of teachers becoming more experienced in the use of synthetic phonics and how to maximise children's performance in tests.

Attitudes to schools formed from prior experiences, stories and press reports may be modified by entering a classroom or observing children in the playground as mere exposure can change an individual's attitude (Zajonc, 1968 cited in Maio and Haddock, 2010). In the UK, some parents assist in classrooms or join the PTFA (parents, teachers and friends association). School governing bodies enlist parents and local professionals to assist in certain decision-making and managerial tasks. Body et al. (2017) surveyed a large number of UK primary schools and found that 93% felt volunteers formed an important part of their community and that 73% would like to increase the number of volunteers they have. Raising funds or offering practical support in the classroom and on trips were the most common activities reported, and a small number of schools reported that volunteers even performed general maintenance. Teachers appreciated volunteers not only for their professional skills but also for being role models and even providing emotional support for children.

Not all parents who choose to home educate have an anti-school attitude (Kraft 2013a); some of the parents in the present study did not expect to home educate permanently but wished to delay school entry. Because of the traditional September-time school start, August-born babies will have just turned three upon entry to nursery and Lingard et al. (2013) believe that small children are being 'pathologised' for being developmentally behind. Younger ones are more likely to be placed in intervention groups to catch up with their peers rather than being accepted as performing at the age-appropriate level. Teachers interviewed by Mitchell (2019) stated that the younger ones did not always understand that they had to sit and listen. The researchers also observed that their attention span was shorter, especially when the children were tired in the afternoons. Mitchell's summary about educator perceptions conjures up an image of anxious little children, not be used to being away from home:

> *Physically, they were perceived as having less well-developed fine and gross motor skills and were more clumsy and less co-ordinated, often being physically smaller, more like toddlers. Socially and emotionally, summer-born children were perceived as babied and more needy of adult attention, especially boys. It was felt that they were more likely to have separation issues and not feel so safe in their environment often coming across as 'a little bit lost'* (2019:211).

Government publication of school assessment data led to stories in the UK press about the underachievement of summer born children such as Everett's article (2015) in *The Telegraph* entitled 'Why Summer Born Children Are Scarred for Life'. This may have affected attitudes and resulted in more parents submitting applications to delay their child's entry to reception year. Santry (2018) reported that local authorities received 916 requests in 2015

but the year after there were 1,750. This rise may also have been due to parents becoming more aware of their right to delay full-time attendance by flexi-schooling until compulsory school age, even if their request was denied by the head teacher. Upon reading the early years assessment criteria, Fensham-Smith's (2017) participant, Iona concluded that her four-year-old would be labelled as slow. Like some of my participants, Iona is a qualified teacher so has an insight into the pressures facing both staff and children.

Influences on attitudes to parenting

The following section addresses factors that have influenced parents' attitudes to raising their children. Although the subcategory of my grounded theory is about parenting style in general, all but one of the participants in this study was female so the focus of this section is predominantly to do with mothering. Parenting inequality is present in the literature and, for those families who are home educating, the mother is likely to carry out household tasks in addition to educating the child (Morton, 2011). The fathers in Morton's study were mostly absent; only one out of 19 had sole charge of the day-to-day activities; three had some involvement. The general role of the fathers was to provide financial support and a good role model, yet they still had the deciding vote over how to educate their child. The mothers in her study constructed themselves as experts on their children and this contributed to their 'unwillingness to share responsibility for their children with the state' (Morton, 2011:181). Morton's study participants prioritised their children over their other roles such as having a career, but felt it was a fine balance between being a good mother and retaining their identity. This dichotomy is present in many recent discussions on motherhood. In her Grounded Theory study of MumsNet threads, MacKenzie (2016) identified a discourse she labelled 'child-centric motherhood' which some of the mothers

were resisting by deriding those subscribing to attachment parenting, one poster labelling

the others the "if you have any time for yourself you're neglectful 'brigade'"(2016:130).

In a thematic analysis (using Grounded Theory) comparing articles about mothers' paid work

and childcare that were published in Canadian parenting magazine 'Today's Parent', from

either the late 1980s or the late 2000s, Wall (2013) found that children shift from being

framed as resilient and capable to more vulnerable and needy. A notable example is that in

the 1980s, having two working parents was described as providing good role models to the

child and contributing to their future success, yet the newer articles warned that too little

time spent at home would affect the child's well-being. Looking for childcare that suited the

family's needs morphed over twenty years into looking for jobs or flexible hours that would

fit in with the family. The mothers' needs tended to dominate the older articles whereas

the child was the focus of the latter ones. Wall reminds us that the context in the 1980s was

that mothers were being encouraged to enter the workforce and articles seemed to offer

reassurance that this was a positive move for the children and gender equality; by the late

2000s the majority of women were already working, and the neoliberal discourse of risk was

beginning to exert itself. In the preceding section, I noted the risk that some parents

associate with sending a child to nursery or school. I return to the role of feelings and

emotions in the **surveying the landscape** section of this review.

Hays' study of the cultural contradictions of motherhood, published in 1996 predated the

advent of social media. In it, she discusses the role of parenting manuals and finds the

theme of intensive parenting present in the bestselling books at that time (e.g. derogatory

views of full time childcare). According to Hays (1996) parenting manuals (at that time)

tended to convey the message that motherhood is more important than paid work.

Hays (1996) thoroughly examines many reasons for the rise in intensive parenting, in which the mother invests huge amounts of time and effort, and loses earnings through giving up paid work. A strong argument she proposes is that it mainly benefits 'men, whites, the upper classes, capitalist owners and state leaders' (1996:162). In her opinion, by staying out of the workforce, women are less likely to compete with men and more likely to accept lower wages. Raising the status of stay-at-home mothers means they are justified in not working. Most importantly, she believes that they are bringing up obedient children who will turn out to be good workers and consumers. A counter argument posited by Hays is that these mothers are avoiding state control and hope their children will become free-thinking individuals.

Frank Furedi (2001) echoes Hays in that recent changes in parenting practice at the turn of the century were due to the constant bombardment of information by 'experts'. This information has become even more widespread due to rapid advances in communications technology (Furedi, 2001). In the early days of the internet, Facebook and social media based on interest groups were less prevalent and it was more difficult to find information online. Despite this, one of Fensham-Smith's (2017) participants recalled investigating natural childbirth online in 1997 and it leading to her reading about home education. Within just a few months, she turned from a sceptic to somebody who wanted to try it for herself.

In his 2001 book 'Paranoid Parenting: Abandon your Anxieties and be a Good Parent', Furedi raises concerns that over protection of children is leading them to feel at greater risk than they really are (e.g. 'stranger danger', sexual abuse and accidents). In Wall's (2013) aforementioned analysis of magazine articles, a discourse of risk was also identified in the

more recent writing. Instead of looking for childcare settings that met the mother's needs and the child would be happy, parents were now being advised to look for safety features and purely focus on the child.

> *Within the neoliberal risk rationality characteristic of the late 2000s, meeting children's needs and avoiding ubiquitous risks is understood to require a great deal of careful research and planning on the part of mothers. Thus, articles at this time are also focused on individual ways to plan for and avoid any of the problems or risks that can accompany mothers' employment and various childcare arrangements. The message to mothers is that child outcomes are within their individual control, if they take responsibility to educate themselves, make the right choices and plans, and be prepared if trouble occurs* (Wall, 2013:169-170).

Mothers interviewed by Hays' (1996) hoped that they would form long-term intimate ties and felt that they would feel lonely or empty if they were childless. These mothers were not home educators but many used intensive child rearing methods. Aurini and Davies (2005) cite a mother who stated: 'If my kids aren't near me, I'm like really empty' (2005:470). Kraftl (2013b), too, found that parents who home educated were likely to mention breastfeeding, attachment parenting and child-led weaning.

Some parents in Merry and Howell's (2009) study felt that children going to school led to loss of intimacy between the parent and child. The parents were concerned that teachers who do not know the child well could miss difficulties with learning, bullying and risk-taking behaviour. The home educating parents believed they could intervene earlier as they would be more likely to see changes due to being in constant communication with their child. The converse argument is that parents being too close may prevent self-expression and

exploration of other beliefs and values (Merry and Howell, 2009). Parenting gives meaning to people's lives and often success is measured in relation to how we believe our children have turned out (Warnick, 2014).

According to Morton (2011), sacrifices parents (mostly mothers) make in order to home educate are their careers, income and expenditure on home education. Additionally, they lose 'me time' and the status and identity provided by having a job outside the home. Morton's study showed that being a home educator provided a feeling of satisfaction and that being a member of a support group or finding support through friends reduced the feeling of isolation. There was a balance between fulfilment and strain however, and one parent was crying out to send her child anywhere for a day or two. Some parents shared childcare in order to find time for themselves. This also enabled them to utilise the other parent's expertise.

Attitudes to learning

This section relates to the subcategory of attitudes to learning. Home educators use a variety of teaching strategies and it is not possible to neatly categorise their methods as a blend of approaches are often used depending on the age and needs of the child. As stated in Chapter 2, home educators are not a 'homogenous group' (Morton, 2010). In Morton's (2010) study, the parents who were categorised as having 'social' reasons for their choice were more likely to implement formal teaching strategies whereas the 'natural' ones would use a more autonomous approach. The majority of interviewees in Lees' (2011) study favoured an autonomous style.   A mother quoted by Aurini and Davies (2005) stated that she was a structured home schooler, but believed that half of home schoolers did not teach

anything at all; those parents were most likely expecting that their children would learn through life experiences

Other studies of home educators illustrate the variation in attitudes to learning. In a two-year US study of Christian conservative home educators, Kunzman (2009) observed a wide range of techniques and competencies in teaching methods. In one household, he admired a father teaching art in an inspirational way because art and music were the man's passions at school. However:

> *The consequences of this relative neglect of other subjects aren't difficult to see. During the art lesson, for instance, twelve-year-old Aaron struggles with his math, which involves multiplying two-digit numbers. He continues to use his fingers to multiply, even with problems such as 'five times nine' – counting forty-five fingers in all. A girl mesmerized by an art lesson, next to her twelve-year-old brother doing math on his fingers – the potential and peril of the Complete Home Education Program* (2009:314).

Following passions and enjoying the process of learning brings into question the use of rewards in education. Many alternative educators try to avoid the use of extrinsic rewards in order to encourage intrinsic motivation and a child's natural propensity for learning. School based research into motivation showed very similar themes to the 'child-led' beliefs of the home educating community. In that:

> *…research revealed that not only tangible rewards but also threats, deadlines, directives, pressured evaluations, and imposed goals diminish intrinsic motivation because, like tangible rewards, they conduce toward an external perceived locus of causality. In contrast, choice, acknowledgment of feelings, and opportunities for self-*

direction were found to enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a greater feeling of autonomy (Ryan and Deci, 2000:70).

The 2009 Badman review raised questions about the effectiveness of autonomous education and argued that further research into outcomes of home education is needed. Not all home educators have the skills required to facilitate the learning process, a problem highlighted by a recent Dispatches investigation by the Children's Commissioner (Children's Commissioner, 2019). The Channel 4 documentary that accompanied the report showed parents struggling to educate their children at home. The children were home educated because school was not meeting their needs such as autism and anxiety.

> *Many parents who make a philosophical decision to home educate put a substantial amount of thought and dedication into providing their children with a high quality education. But as this report has shown, there are many other families out there who have ended up home educating for other reasons, and are struggling to cope. There needs to be a cultural shift away from pressurised, hot-housing schools, to help stem the tide of children entering home education when it is not in the family's true interests or wishes* (Children's Commissioner, 2019:18).

This statement is very interesting as it reflects the reason why many home educating parents have turned away from schools. This 'tide' of children entering home education seems to mirror the tide of once dedicated, enthusiastic teachers who are moving to other professions. Reductions in funding have increased workload and decreased the number of teaching assistants in schools so students with special needs and learning/behavioural difficulties are not getting the help they need (Edwards, 2019).

Home educators often cite concerns about school class sizes believing that their children benefit from more personalised attention and learning styles (Rothermel, 2003). Badman (2009) criticised much home education research due to its self-selecting nature and proposed that good outcomes could be down to the influence of well-educated parents. In the home, parents are able to dedicate more of their attention to their children and this attention alone has been shown to have a positive effect on motivation to learn. For example, Katz et al. (2011) conducted research on parental attitudes to their children's homework. If parents found helping their children to be enjoyable and valuable there was less likely to be negative emotion associated with it. This enabled them to be 'more able to be empathetic to their child and behave in ways that support the child's needs for relatedness, competence and autonomy' (2011:382).

In addition to recruiting parents, Fensham-Smith (2017) also interviewed home educated teenagers at a camp during her research. The choices made were ultimately due to parental attitudes to learning. Worrying issues were highlighted in the research such as a girl who realised she was self-teaching the wrong exam board specification for GCSE maths. A bittersweet tale in the data was a boy whose single mother could not afford the GCSE entry fees so he was unable to access subjects at his local college. Upon completion of online programmes, he gained acceptance on an IT course. The children that make it to college and/or university will be re-entering a system with traditional teachers and lecturers. 'The desire to journey to an alternative destination in home education is one that is slightly at odds with journeying back towards more visible forms of pedagogy' (Fensham-Smith, 2017:222). This observation is particularly pertinent as it summarises the paradox of wanting autonomous, child-led learning yet desiring certificates that provide access to the full range of career pathways.

Surveying the landscape

The literature presented in this section refers to the category in my grounded theory entitled **surveying the landscape.** Parents formally research by seeking information about suitable schools, alternatives, home education groups and success stories about home educated children. However, not all research is carried out in a formal manner with the goal being to seek answers to questions; some is by hearing the opinions of others via word-of-mouth stories, unsolicited advice and media articles. The subcategory of **following feelings** has links with both of the others as information heard, read and found online as well as visiting places provoke affective reactions. This constitutes the parent's internal landscape.

Formally researching education choices

This section addresses how parents research how to educate their child. There are many theories in existence about information seeking behaviour and in their review, Bawden and Robinson (2008) highlight some of the issues associated with having such an abundance of content online. Information overload, for example may lead to stress and anxiety or there may be issues with authority of sources as some will be anonymous but are presented in a format that conveys the same level of legitimacy. According to Bawden and Robinson (2008), no detailed theoretical framework fully explains and predicts human information seeking behaviour, as there are so many contexts. Those that attempt to cover too many types of information seeking tend to be so vague that they fail to be useful. More specific ones are helpful because they can focus on a certain aspect of life such as seeking information about cancer (Smith-McLallen et al., 2011) and searching for birth parents via the Adoption Curiosity Pathway (Wrobel and Dillon, 2009 cited in Wrobel et al., 2013). More generalised models such as the Planned Risk Information Seeking Model (PRISM)

which was initially developed to theorise health information seeking (Kahlor,2010) have been applied to situations such as making political decisions (Kahlor et al., 2018).

Searching for the perfect place to educate one's child is nothing new, but this aspect of parental decision-making has changed dramatically over the last 30 years as schools now compete for pupils via websites and glossy prospectuses. The introduction of competition into the education market in 1997, by allowing more schools to be applied for, meant that 'good schools' became over-subscribed and surplus places were available in those perceived to be poor (Blakemore, 2003). Critics of the introduction of market forces into education warned that there may be 'spirals of decline' (Gorard et al., 2003:24) in which a school's poor results lead to fewer aspirational parents applying and a higher proportion of children being from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Lower numbers lead to decreases in funding, which may, in itself, affect results (Gorard et al., 2003).

To assist parents in making their decision about school choice the UK government provide a website (compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk). This site has links to Ofsted school inspection reports and at-a-glance graphs of pupil assessment data in comparison with local and national averages. GCSE results are not an indicator of how successful a school is as they depend on the intake of children so, in addition, the government also publish contextual value added (CVA) scores. Often, though the scores are not significantly different from one another so ranking them is inappropriate and conveys false information about school superiority. Parents are not informed about the degree of uncertainty in the data that is demonstrated by the 95% confidence intervals (Leckie and Goldstein, 2011). Angus (2013) is critical of the introduction of a similar school comparison website in Australia, in that the ranking assumes that performance is purely down to the schools and

not socio-cultural factors. Middle class parents have the option of fee-paying or selective schools and, like in the UK, the system leads to those who already have advantage succeeding in gaining places. In the quote below, Angus expresses his concern about the introduction of neoliberal forces in education:

> *This is not to argue that schools can do nothing to redress the situation for less-advantaged and minority students, but it is to argue that schools serving students who have been put at a disadvantage are unlikely to achieve much by simply trying to compete in neoliberal terms. Such an approach merely entrenches greater social and economic differentiation* (Angus, 2013:410).

Middle class parents explore the markets and are more likely to understand the application process and attend multiple open days. (Ball et al., 1993). They may also utilise their ability to move to a new house or transport their children further to attend a desired school. Research published a few years after the changes to the application process were made showed that working class parents were more likely to choose a school in their local community for reasons such as their child being with friends and ease of access (Ball et al., 1993). One benefit of opening up the market was to decrease segregation by allowing those from more socio-economically deprived areas to access schools previously unobtainable. A concern was that children from higher socio-economic groups would still benefit most but further research showed that poorer children were enrolling more in schools in areas where their parents cannot afford to live (Gorard et al., 2003). Over the past thirty years, a similar situation has occurred in Spain in that schools have opened their doors to children beyond the traditional catchment areas. In an attempt to mitigate for the advantages of living in a

more affluent postcode, parental income is taken into account in applications. As in the UK, those wanting to avoid their local school might opt for fee paying schools:

> *In this case, it is worth spending a family's resources to gain a 'good education', or in a simpler and more direct way, they are paying to assure a 'safe' environment, the necessary control and the right company* (Olmedo Reinoso, 2008:184).

In Olmedo Reinoso's (2008) Grounded Theory study, one set of parents in the so called 'new middle class' who were residents of a working class area researched a potential school by visiting the Regional Education Department. In addition to their inquiry about exam grades they also discovered which prizes had been awarded at the school e.g.in sports. Performance data and inspection grades do convince some parents that a school is of high quality, but not all parents have the same priorities when choosing a school. Galotti and Tinkelenberg (2009) carried out a large-scale quantitative study of American parents making the decision about where to send their child for first grade. The most important factors stated by the participants were convenience, curriculum structure, teacher characteristics, class size, climate and cost. The term, school climate however, is difficult to define, as it is multi-dimensional. Wang and Degol (2016) examined four aspects of school climate: academic, community, safety and institutional environment. Of course, the climate of a school is impossible to fully describe and measure as it encompasses components such as beliefs, attitudes and values. These qualities are very difficult for parents to gauge from open days and promotional literature.

As stated in the introductory literature review in Chapter 2, local authority websites vary in how much information they offer about home education. Instead, formal research tends to

begin with parents seeking information from websites such as Education Otherwise (Lees, 2011), a charity with a phone line who offer guidance and legal information. The site provides sample letters for example about requesting deregistration from school or in response to a claim that the LA does not have sufficient information to suggest a suitable education is being provided (Educationotherwise.org, no author or date). The existence of online groups was researched thoroughly by Fensham-Smith (2019) who concluded that their existence had facilitated the increase in home educating families and that it had made it easier to 'find your tribe', but that some groups did not offer free access to all.

Purposeful online information gathering such as watching YouTube clips about home education could be considered formal research using an informal source as the initial search would be intentional; however, subsequent viewing can become directed by algorithms (Hilbert et al., 2018). YouTube wish to maximise viewing time, and this is easier to do if suggested videos are similar to previous ones watched as explained in the quotation below.

> *self-reinforcing responses are much easier to program than any other kind of dialectical or critical response. This is simply because there are relatively few ways to agree with somebody, but infinite ways to disagree* (Hilbert et al., 2018:261).

Reading books, articles and websites are obvious sources of formal information seeking but these are also examples of informal and formal sources overlapping. This is demonstrated by an unintended outcome of the Badman report (2009) being that press coverage advertised the possibility to parents who previously may not have considered home education. A formal source in this situation may be a press report but reading about it may have been a non-purposeful uptake of information. An Education Otherwise member stated

in Lees (2011) study that the charity receives a lot more enquiries when home education is in the news.

Informal sources

Alongside the formal, deliberate research about how to educate one's child, is the equally important uptake of information via informal means. The subcategory of my grounded theory is named hearing opinions of others, because the term 'informal research' implies that the opinions were pursued in a purpose manner. This subcategory ranges from conversations about schools with other parents and friends, to the unplanned reading of newspaper articles and conversations occurring on online chats for example on home education forums. I presented extant research on the influence of online forums for home educators in the section about technology in Chapter 2   Information may also come in the form of hearing the opinions of trusted friends and relatives; which may be sought or unexpected.

This type of information uptake has been theorised in the form of the everyday life information seeking or ELIS framework. This model was developed to account for the importance of serendipitous, non-intentional information discovery although it also incorporates active information seeking behaviours (that I would include into the formal research subcategory). The accidental occurrences differ from the premeditated pursuit of information, but are not always due to a random encounter or chance reading of a newspaper article etc. Orientating information gained from the media e.g. a television programme may lead to the seeking out of more practical information from other sources in order to solve the problem (Savolainen, 1995).   MacKenzie (2003) reminds us that information may be transferred by proxy by another (either known to them or a stranger)

when the individual is identified as an information seeker using methods such as the recounting of stories or by prescribing advice. ELIS also incorporates active scanning e.g. by observing the behaviour of others, listening to them and recognising who to ask questions of in spontaneous encounters once the individual has discovered a potential source of information. An example of this is asking questions of another parent once a connection has been made about them having a similar experience or information about an event or setting.

 Often the advice and opinions are negative, and hearing unsolicited opinions is so common to home educating parents that they speak of having pre-prepared answers for example: 'Around the world, homeschool parents call it the "S question" – "What about socialization?"' (Ray, 2017:90). Parents even receive these types of criticisms from close contacts. Nelson (2013) labels the initial reaction of family members as scepticism. Pattison (2015) explored reasons for this and writes that both physical disruption and conceptual disturbance occurs, as it challenges definitions of both home and school. Similarly, 32% of Rothermel's (2003) respondents believed that not being accepted by others was a disadvantage of home education and criticism from family members often caused distress.

According to Stevens (2001), popular acceptance of home schooling in the USA was facilitated by advocates providing new stories to the press about successful children, legal status and profiles of home educating families. Portraying the movement as done by 'regular people' has aided the normalisation process over the past thirty or so years (Stevens, 2001:93).

Information gained from other parents can provide a picture of what a school or setting is really like. A recent study of childcare choice in England showed that the opinions of other

parents were an important factor. Suggestions from neighbours, friends and family were

utilised and some participants believed that the 'full picture' of a setting could not be seen

unless parents had been spoken to (Chen and Bradbury, 2020). Ball and Vincent (1998)

discuss the role of 'the grapevine' in the development of parental opinions in that informal

social networks provide information that cannot be gleaned by visiting the school. The

information holds more weight if it is from a person they respect, for example a parent with

children who had good experiences at the school. Formal, public knowledge is said to be

'cold' and viewed with scepticism whereas the grapevine is 'hot'. The personal experiences

are perceived to be more trustworthy and useful, and they are often based on affective

responses. Parents tend to mention how they feel about a school overall, not just about the

data the school publishes. This also links to the section below on literature related to the

following feelings subcategory as the information gained often elicits and affective

response**.** Research findings suggest that parents place importance on hearing about the

happiness and attitudes of children such as whether they respect the grounds (Ball and

Vincent, 1998). The people who make up 'the grapevine' are not always going to be the

same, so individuals gain different perspectives depending on who they are mixing with. For

example, an immigrant parent with few links with her neighbours found she could not

access the information, and a widowed father believed it was more a female-led discussion

(Ball and Vincent, 1998). Hearing about the social and ethnic make-up of a school was

evidenced in their data. For example, a white parent did not look around one school

'because of the Indians, I'm afraid' and conversely, a South Asian parent did not consider a

predominantly white school as they had heard it was 'a bit rough' (Ball and Vincent, 1998).

Middle-class parents in a US study entitled 'Buying homes, buying schools' trusted the

opinions of other such as work colleagues and were willing to move area thus altering the

demographic of the population near to certain schools. The construction of whether a school is labelled 'good' or 'bad' occurs via parents gaining information about whether or not the school is chosen by parents perceived as having high status (Holme, 2002).

In Spain, trust in information about schools from networks of friends and colleagues occurs in a similar way. The participants in Olmedo Reinoso's (2008) study often referred to their use of social capital to gain advantage either by accessing information or actually gaining entry to schools they consider to be prestigious. The participants believed the professions of the other parents to be an important factor, not only in the perceived quality of their children as friends who might encourage good working habits, but also as part of developing a network that might be useful in the future. One parent admitting that is sounded selfish but that having a surgeon as her son's friend's father might benefit her personally should she need his services.

Advice from others may not be beneficial for everyone, however. For example, in Myers and Bhopal's (2018) small-scale case study of two Muslim families, the parents of one, upon relocating to a new city for work, accepted the advice given by university colleagues and sent their son to a school in an affluent, predominantly white area. The child became unhappy, having previously attended a school in London with a mix of ethnic groups and the decision was made to home educate him. Reay has written extensively about school choice and in a 2015 paper entitled 'Bourdieu with feelings', she examined parental responses to the choices on offer now the English school market has been opened up to competition. I return to Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus* and *field* in Chapter 7 but the idea of discomfort is pertinent here. Reay states that:

Dealing with such unfamiliar educational fields generates conflicts and tensions, as well as the difficult and uncomfortable feelings that accompany them (Reay, 2015:16).

Seeking people like us

The accounts of our middle-class mothers of their choice of childcare are infused with emotion, with chance occurrences and with the influence of choices of 'people like us' (Vincent et al., 2010:295).

Although the subcategory of my grounded theory is entitled **following feelings**, here I introduce literature on a specific element of the decision-making journey that influences these affective reactions. The literature in this section also relates to the subcategory of **hearing opinions of others**.

Homophily is the reason the trust and bonds form between the members of certain groups. McPherson et al. (2001) use the terms status homophily, where individuals cluster according to socio-demographic factors, and value homophily in which groups form who share beliefs. The term 'homophilous sorting' is used to describe the clustering together of like-minded individuals (McPherson et al., 2001). This happens physically e.g. at toddler groups and social events, but recent developments in technology that facilitate communication have opened up access to a much larger community of parents online. The website, MumsNet, for example, is a popular place for discussions and information on a wide variety of issues as well as general chats. In its nineteen years of existence it has built up a large following with '10 million unique visitors per month clocking up around 100 million page views' (MumsNet, 2020). As an 'observer-participant' in her doctoral study, MacKenzie (2016) became a silent user of MumsNet and despite not posting, describes feeling an affiliation with the

community after a five-month period of reading their threads and posts. Her bonding with the group despite not engaging with users demonstrates the power of this type of forum in rousing feelings and influencing opinions.

Fensham-Smith concluded that finding other home educating parents enabled those considering it to imagine what home education would be like before making the decision. Support was available as they could ask questions and they received 'reassurance that gave them the confidence to take a leap into the unknown' (2017:230). There are very few examples of those who have not had a successful home education journey; however, an article in the *Daily Mail* newspaper highlighted the problems encountered by a selection of families. The reasons the parents gave for discontinuing home education were that the children missed their friends and that it was difficult to plan stimulating lessons every day. For one mother, the strain she was under began to negatively affect her relationship with her three children (Nicholas, 2016).

Confirmation bias is the phenomenon of avoiding acquiring information that does not agree with pre-existing beliefs (Nickerson, 1998). It is shown to play a part in polarisation of online groups as contradictory evidence is largely ignored and information that confirms opinions is automatically accepted even if it contains incorrect content (Zollo et al., 2015). Hart et al. (2009) found that participants select information to read that confirms their ideological standpoint but may also read the opposing views to maintain an unbiased position or to be able to converse with others who hold differing ideologies. In the field of home education, this is an area where the literature cannot provide any answers. Additionally, websites rarely display stories where home education has not been a positive experience, although news articles about children returning to school after home education

has been unsuccessful are beginning to emerge such as the *Schoolsweek* article entitled "Home education doubles, with schools left to 'pick up pieces' when it fails". The article's author, Staufenberg, states that councils report that many of the cases are due to parents withdrawing children to avoid fines for truancy, or because the schools were not meeting children's individual or behavioural needs. The re-engagement with mainstream schooling in the final years of secondary school could be due to the expense of sitting exams privately, but chair of the education select committee warned that it was difficult for children to catch up after missing a large amount of education (Staufenberg, 2017).

Parents from traveller communities stated the types of people being present as a reason why they might not want to attend home education groups. Such communities tend to become isolated as a result and there is limited and variable support available via LAs. Some traveller parents were not aware of local groups or even the discourse on elective home education in the press (Bhopal and Myers, 2016). Their reasons for home education may not be in alignment with the others in the groups. In fact, home education is not actually perceived as an alternative in traveller communities that have historically not engaged with schools.

Finding a group that share similar opinions, however, does not necessarily mean a parent will feel welcome. Cliques are present in most aspects of society and Fensham-Smith's (2017) research demonstrated this in that home educators with differing ideologies isolated themselves from each other. Certain individuals determined group identities and rules, but this was not always appreciated and Nelson (2013) included quotes from parents who thought some group leaders want things done their way. Her participant, Joy, stated of the leaders: they 'need to get down off their high horse for a minute and just leave us all alone

and let us get on with it' (2013:167) and one believed they did not want new members to join. Morton (2011) noted some of the 'natural' home educators were suspicious of the parents that had chosen it for other reasons. These are further examples that illustrate the non-homogeneity of home educating parents and how difficult it would be to form a cohesive group with representatives. In the last twenty years, finding like-minded individuals online has become easier due to advances in technology. As far back as 2001, Gergen linked this ease of connectivity to an increase in activist groups and subcultures who share the same values.

However, the parents gain information and advice about schools, home education or alternative providers, the role of feelings cannot be ignored. I explore these topics further in the following sections.

Conceptualising feelings and emotions

Having identified the importance of feelings in the literature above, I now unpick what is meant by these terms. The subcategory of **following feelings** is very broad as it encompasses feelings about the child going to school and also anxiety related to disengaging with mainstream education. It also covers feelings induced by the information they have gathered. Decisions as important as educational choice are not made by simply scrutinising evidence in an unbiased way. '[W]e use our hearts and intuitions as well as our heads, and we are motivated to get them right' (Galotti, 2002:x). As stated earlier, formal and informal research both induce affective feelings and emotions in the parents. Choice is highly emotive; it is not simply a rational analysis of information because 'issues of school choice are emotionally complex' (Angus, 2013:407).

Before I introduce literature on the role of feelings in educational choice, I would like to acknowledge the plethora of ways of defining affect, emotion, and feelings. The history of research in these areas is complex and spans disciplines, often with each having little regard for the ideas of those from other fields. Thus, it has become a polarised topic. Margaret Wetherell (2012) calls for, and goes someway in providing, an interdisciplinary approach to the role of affect and emotion in practice. She maintains, and I agree, that the traditional concepts of basic emotions labelled by psycho-biologists cannot describe the rich variety of responses humans feel and express. However, at the other end of the spectrum, the Deleuzian notion of affect being a force 'does not always work well either' (Wetherelll, 2012:3). Vigil (2009) states that he:

> *…operationally defines emotions as expressive behaviors that are often associated with the conscious awareness of intense, appealing and aversive sensations. Likewise, I define a social expression as any behavior that is both observable and can be exaggerated or attenuated by the individual's audience or other social context* (2009:376).

This is not the place for a comprehensive review of literature in this field (see Wetherell, 2012 for a balanced critique of the numerous standpoints) however, as emotion continually emerged in the data, I felt the need to explore what emotion is and why and how we feel it.

Barrett (2006) states that many researchers' work depends on the taken for granted assumption that there are emotions universal to us all despite their being no consistently recognisable pattern of bodily changes distinct to each one. Barrett (2017b) claims that emotions are constructed as the brain runs an embodied simulation to model the world and predict physiological needs. 'Emotions are constructions of the world, not reactions to it'

(2017b:16). Our internal environments are changing constantly, and the brain must make predictions about what resources etc. will be needed in order not to waste anything for example, by over releasing stored glucose or over producing hormones. This is a survival mechanism, and we must remember the brain has evolved predominantly to enable us to grow and live to reproduce. According to Barrett (2017b):

> *(i.e. the brain creates its affective niche in the present based on what has been relevant for allostastis in the past). Everything else is an extravagance that puts energy regulation at risk* (2017b:16).

Parts of the brain thought to be responsible for our feelings, are actually delicately co-ordinating a whole host of responses as part of allostasis; the adjustment of physiological levels based on prediction (Sterling, 2011). There is degeneracy in these areas, which means the brain using the same neuron hubs to perform different functions, thus ensuring efficiency. The areas thought to be responsible for emotions are multifunctional in that they also play a role in co-ordinating autonomic (responses that happen without conscious thought), endocrine (hormone), immune, skeletomotor (movement) and sensory inputs. Barrett (2017b) reminds us that sensations of affect are not unique to emotion, but that we humans like to categorise things into discrete concepts such as the naming of basic emotions.

> *scientists must abandon essentialism and study emotions in all their variety. We must not merely focus on the few stereotypes that have been stipulated based on a very selective reading of Darwin* (2017b:16).

Cultural influences on bodily feelings is a fascinating area of research with language and traditional stories playing a part (see Breugelmans et al., 2005 and Breugelmans &

Poortinga, 2006 for studies from a variety of non-Western cultures). In Britain, we often refer to our body metaphorically for example, we feel butterflies in our tummy or that our heart is in our mouth. Self-reported bodily maps of where emotions are felt in individuals show similarities regardless of the languages spoken by the individuals according to a (2014) study by Nummenmaa et al. Despite this evidence of universality of sensation, Barrett recalls friends and colleagues who, upon migrating to the United States, found their natural emotions were 'not a good fit for American culture' (2017a: 149). Enthusiasm, praise and smiling, it seems, are not the universal norm. The often subtle enforcement of *emotional regimes* (Reddy, 2010) in a society dictate what can and cannot be expressed. How they change throughout history is an area I return to as I build my own conceptual framework in Chapter 7.

Americanised terms for emotions are also context specific and were defined relatively recently. Can a culture be said to have an emotion if their vocabulary does not allow for its labelling? Most research is carried out using the English language which Barrett (2017a) raises as a criticism. She states that even the concept of what an emotion is differs between cultures with Westerners defining it as an internal state, others believing it requires two or more individuals and some having no unified concept for what we might call emotion at all (Australian Aborigines for example).

Referring to instinct as having a 'gut feeling' may correspond to changes to the blood supply to the digestive system caused by the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system (as in the fight or flight reaction). This may be a simplistic interpretation however, as gut-brain signalling is very complex and involves the enteric nervous system as well as immune, endocrine, and even microbial signalling. The role of the gut in mood and emotion is still

speculative but is likely to be a two-way process with hormones and nervous impulses affecting the gut as well as the gut communicating with the brain. As a biologist, I find this area fascinating, but it is beyond the scope of the present study. For a comprehensive review of the history of the physiology and molecular biology involved, see Mayer (2011).

Emotions in parental decision making

Moving on from general literature about emotions and feelings, I now turn to the role of emotions in parenting and decision-making. The participants in Lois's (2009) study of home educators were labelled as deviant for 'having ''too much'' of the ''right'' emotions—confidence, protectiveness, morality, and engagement' (2009:229). According to Louis (2009), these are terms that would normally be associated with good parenting; however, I believe that cultural norms prescribe acceptable levels of each.

Hays (1996) found examples of mothers who would take advice about parenting 'with a pinch of salt'. She concluded that mothers mostly seek advice for reassurance, with statements quoted such as 'I look for things that I agree with' and 'I believe what feels good with me' (1996: 74). The phenomenon of seeking evidence to confirm what we already know is summarised in the quote below:

> *We sometimes delude ourselves that we proceed in a rational manner and weigh all the pros and cons of the various alternatives. But this is seldom the actual case. Quite often "I decided in favour of X" is no more than "I liked X". Most of the time, information collected about alternatives serves us less for making a decision than for justifying it afterwards* (Zajonc, 1980:155).

Choosing a school in England can be a process fraught with stress and anxiety (Williams, 2014). School visits and discussions with other parents are time-consuming. Local authorities in England allow up to six choices on the application form. The much simpler Scottish system of being in a school's zone and the default being to accept the place is very different. English parents in one study spoke of feelings of guilt during the decision-making process due to its far-reaching consequences (Bhattacharya, 2019). Once the application form was submitted, they experienced relief. Parents compared listing school choices to a gamble that caused angst and lack of sleep. Bhattacharya (2019) believed security and certainty to be important to parents and that the Scottish system was more straightforward thus causing less anxiety.

In a study of childcare choice that compared working class and middle-class parents, the researchers found that participants made the decision by using a combination of formal information and feelings. The use of the phrase 'gut instinct' in the quote below implies a knowing based on visceral reactions to a place.

> *Both groups were heavily influenced by their affective responses to settings, their*
>
> *'gut instinct' about both the physicalities of settings and the carers themselves*
>
> (Vincent et al., 2010:284).

Similar findings were also identified in a later study of childcare choice in England, in that holistic 'feeling' was considered alongside information about quality upon visiting a setting. Practical considerations were important at the start and end of the decision-making process with an in-between phase entitled 'quality comparison' that had similar elements to my **surveying the landscape** category (Chen & Bradbury, 2020). Phrases that mention some form of affect were common in their data such as:

I do think instinct is very important, I really do. You know you meet someone, you know if you are happy if they can take care of your child (Joan) (Chen & Bradbury, 2020:291).

Lois' (2009) participant 'Gretchen' had a very poor opinion of school standards. She used her 'physical reaction' and 'spiritual experience' to justify her confidence that home education was the right decision. The quote below clearly illustrates the role of following one's 'gut' and how this can motivate parents to take extreme measures to pursue what they feel is right.

...so you have to go with your gut instinct ultimately erm and at the moment certainly my gut instinct and belief is this is the only way to do it and I would certainly consider moving and leaving the country if it meant I had to change, you know, my belief and sometimes I think to myself why don't more home educators get together and form a cult and say that it's our religion that we want to continue to educate in this form: it's part of our religion and therefore, the government or whoever, needs to accept that or acknowledge that and maybe give us a bit more freedom (Sorena, in Lees 2011:197).

In Lees' (2011) opinion, the parents may be suffering emotionally as they are torn between their knowledge that they are responsible for educating their child and the concern that mainstream schooling will have negative effects. Kraftl (2013a) discusses emotions from a geographical point of view. He writes about the temporalities of feeling which range from being in tune with the child's needs and taking time to develop a relationship with the child to the sense of relief felt when withdrawing a child from school. One of his participants recalls the moment as a 'freeing' experience. Although another acknowledged that the

pressure that was formerly present in the school had now been placed on her. Shock, surprise, satisfaction, and even ecstatic joy are emotion terms used by Lees (2011) and she refers to the discovery as an existential event. Although the participants she interviewed were not home educating for religious reasons, they frequently used religious terminology to aid in their descriptions of how they felt once they had made the decision for example being 'saved'. I would imagine that salvation leads to a sense of relief, likely caused by the removal of the discomfort or fear. Aside from the feelings of discomfort school buildings may confer, Lees (2011) calls for to schools to 'better understand the wide-reaching harm they may cause' (2011:282).

Buildings can evoke feelings in individuals and architects strive to design spaces with certain atmospheres. The alternative educational settings studied by geographer, Kraftl (2013b) varied dramatically in terms of location, ideologies, and pedagogies. He noted however, that two had remarkably similar architecture. The 'Hobbit house' design of a Steiner kindergarten and a prayer and meditation sanctuary at a democratic school both aimed to convey a feeling of homeliness. Homeliness, though, is a subjective term and what feels comfortable to one parent or child may differ to that of another. A dimly lit, low ceilinged cottage may even feel oppressive to somebody raised in a sleek apartment or grandly furnished mansion.

Of course, as I stated earlier, attitudes to schools can vary hugely and not all parents desire high academic outcomes; instead, many parents place importance on properties such as outdoor space and/or a relaxed learning environment. Even the outcomes of education depend on one's perception as summarised in the quote below.

The purpose of education, therefore the content of educational programmes, the standards by which educational progress is judged, the idea of the educated person itself are all permeated by feelings and judgements of value. Ultimately it all depends on one's view of the life worth living (Pring, 1995:135).

My interpretation of the above quote about values is that those parents that strive for their child's happiness and development over qualifications and rewards will place more worth in activities that stimulate different aspects of their personality. Those who value tangible outcomes such as high exam grades may not consider their feelings about a setting to such an extent when making educational decisions.

Feelings are not only evident in the educational decision-making process, but they also play a part in home educators' understanding of the process of learning so there are overlaps with the subcategory of **attitudes to learning**. Kraftl (2013a) observed that:

In many interviews, it became apparent that homeschoolers understood learning less as a product of cognitive reflection and more as something felt, something instinctual, even 'natural' (2013a:444).

Catching emotions

In this short section, I introduce pertinent literature that relates to the subcategory of **following feelings**. It is well documented in the social sciences is that emotion can be a 'contagion' (Hatfield et al., 1994). According to the title of Foulk's (2016) article: 'catching rudeness is like catching a cold'. Emotions have been shown to be transferred from parent to child in a hospital setting (see Oh et al., 2019 for a concept analysis); between colleagues in the workplace (e.g. Barsade, 2002); between partners in a marriage (e.g. Mazzucca et al.,

2018) and historically; amongst in crowds (Le Bon, 1896 cited in Dezecache & Grèzes, 2015).

A wide range of theories exists as to how emotional contagion occurs. This literature is

relevant to the present study as children may be noticing the parental feelings about school

and the parent may be susceptible to the influence of others both in person and online. The

exact mechanism behind emotional transfer is unclear, as it seems to occur in such a wide

variety of contexts. Humans have the capacity to interpret emotion via various sense

organs such as nasally by chemo signals (de Groot et al., 2012) and visually by facial mimicry.

Studies designed to demonstrate the presence of mimicry have utilised novel methods

including EMT sensors to detect facial muscle movement. Whilst not claiming to be the sole

source of emotional transfer, happiness in particular was shown to be conveyed in a

laboratory setting (Olszanowski et al., 2020). Often, as with my study, personal contact has

not occurred, but emotion has been induced via an article or online post, this effect was

demonstrated by a large-scale study of Facebook users that showed negative comments

could influence emotions of users residing in different cities (Coviello et al., 2014). There is

an emerging body of research into emotional transference online e.g. via YouTube videos

(Hilbert et al., 2018). Whilst fascinating and relevant to recent events such as elections and

a referendum, polarisation of online opinions is beyond the scope of this study; however, I

will briefly mention a pertinent study of MumsNet forums (MacKenzie, 2016). By

positioning themselves as adversaries, factions formed due to the construction of group

identities. In identifying MumsNet as a site for resisting cultural norms e.g. discourses on

gendered parenting, MacKenzie asserts that online spaces can provide 'resources for the

negotiation of new and transformative subject positions' (2016:183). She argues that this is

due to the anonymity and access to community members.

Negotiating obstacles

The subcategories of the **negotiating obstacles category** I outlined in the findings section are **accommodating work**, **relocating the family,** and **receiving support**. Because of the overlap between these elements, I have not confined the literature to the same category headings as the findings. This category is closely linked to **surveying the landscape** as solutions can be easily be found online, even if this means looking in other parts of the country or abroad. This online element of decision-making has changed beyond recognition during the past 20 years due to advances in technology as parents can easily research houses, work, social groups, and alternative schools (already outlined in the literature on **surveying the landscape**). The subcategory of **receiving support** encompasses the moral and physical support of friends and family, as well as groups of like-minded parents. Financial support may also play a part as some parents are reliant on others for money or make use of government vouchers to pay for alternative childcare.

Overcoming financial barriers

The literature in this section relates to the subcategory of **accommodating work**, as participants identified financial constraints as a barrier to home education. There are no plans for the UK government to assist with any of the costs of home education, despite the fact that the child is not using a school place (DfE, 2018). The financial outlay for the family could be very great, and even if home educating parents utilise free activities such as museums and libraries, they are giving up their time where previously they may have been a wage earner. If they wish, parents may pay to enter children for exams such as GCSEs and A levels, privately at a local centre.

It is common for parents to adapt their working hours around their children even if they are not home educating so I will not linger for too long on this aspect. A 2019 report from the Office for National Statistics showed 28.5% of mothers had reduced working hours because of childcare compared with 4.8% of fathers. 8% of mothers had changed jobs for this reason (with just 2% of fathers saying the same) (Vizard, 2019).

The findings of studies such as one from Canada refute the stereotype that only 'home maker' mothers home educate their children as some left secure, well-paying jobs (Aurini and Davies, 2005). Similarly, only three of the 24 black mothers interviewed by Fields-Smith and Williams (2009) were stay-at-home mums before home educating; two were teachers and the others gave up a variety of careers including nursing, law, clerical, and retail. Four continued to work part-time or ran their own businesses. Although there is evidence to show that parents will give up or alter their work patterns:

> *Time and income constraints also affect home schooling. In choosing an alternative to public schools, mothers with much time and little income tend to choose home schooling; those with little time and much income tend to choose private schools* (Isenberg, 2006:2).

Having a non-working adult in the house is the strongest predictor of home schooling (Bauman, 2002, cited in Aurini and Davies, 2005). It seems that when the family are already accustomed to managing on one income, the transition to home educating is easier. This finding is supported by data from a US study which states that all else being equal 'having a pre-school child younger than 3 years old increases the probability of homeschooling a school-age sibling by 1.2 percentage points' (Isenberg, 2007:405). Having extra adults at home increases the probability by 0.5%.

There are very close links with the literature on formal/informal research in relation to the **surveying the landscape** findings. For example, parents use various methods to find new locations. House buying now comes with added information in the online listings about the performance of local schools (e.g. Rightmove.co.uk). Isenberg (2006) used data from the US National Household Education Survey to analyse parental choice and concluded that if they were unhappy with the local school then they were likely to choose home schooling if they could not afford to educate privately. In the UK, those who can afford it will move house to be in the catchment of schools with good test scores (Hansen, 2014). The variables involved in educational decision-making process are numerous and depend very much on the situation and location in which the parents find themselves. Vincent (2010) summarises this interplay below:

> Choice' could be better understood as a signifier for a composite of fears, aspirations, contingencies and constraints, norms, social relations, and routines and 'obviousnesses' that are involved in the relations between families and care settings and schools (Vincent et al., 2010:295).

Although **relocating the family** is a subcategory of **negotiating obstacles**, I have not included it as a separate section of the literature review. This is because I presented studies on relocation to access schools in the **surveying the landscape** section. I will however mention a study by Hope (2010), where the willingness of parents to relocate to an alternative school had seemingly altered the demographic of a North Devon village. The school in Hope's study was making an effort to integrate after strained relationships developed with the local community; but interviews with the pupils revealed that some felt 'hated' and perceived as different (e.g. as 'hippies)'. Another example to illustrate the

determination of home educators to **negotiate obstacles** is those reported in the press that have immigrated from Germany to the Isle of Wight. In addition to leaving family and friends, they abandoned belongings in order to move quickly as to avoid prosecution or having their children taken into care (Francis-Pape and Hall, 2008).

Types of support

The final subcategory of **receiving support** incorporated a variety of meanings in the findings. For example, the financial support of the government that may enable parents on a low income to stay at home or work part-time. Then there is the moral support of other home educators locally or virtually, and physical support from friends, family and the other parent. With regard to family support, Nelson's (2013) participants often appreciated the help of grandparents living locally. Morton (2011) found that despite the fact that the vast majority of the child-care and education was being carried out by the mothers, the fathers were generally supportive, but they had the final say over educational decisions. The mothers felt their home educating skills to be on trial and had to prove that the children were doing well.

The support of an LA inspector was fleetingly mentioned in the findings, but I feel it is worthy of exploring as this was a concern of the Badman review (2009). The author stated that there was inconsistency in LA provision but noted examples of good practice where resources, information and a meeting place were provided. The recommendation was that children be able to access LA provided services such as music tuition at the same cost as schools, IT provision and signposting for specialist services.

Provision of financial support overlaps with the section above. The USA differs from the UK in that the education market has been opened up and a voucher system now operates to

enable parents to use government funding to part-pay private school or charter school fees. Home educating parents can now access this funding, but there is no nationwide consensus of how it is implemented. Alaska, for example, places very few regulations on home educating families and has a programme called IDEA (Interior Distance Education of Alaska) with an allotment of approximately £2000 dollars per child (the exact amount depends on age). The list of items and activities that it covers is extensive and includes extra-curricular clubs such as gymnastics and martial arts as well as online courses, tutors, equipment, internet access and field trips (IDEA Homeschool, 2020). The funding will not cover religious teaching resources, however, and children must sit standardised tests at certain ages (Klicka, 2001). Criticisms of these voucher programmes are that succumbing to government schemes means a loss of the freedoms that home educators value, as they suspect handouts to be subject to regulatory criteria. 'Freedom is the answer. Freedom, I believe, is more important than "freebies"' (Klicka, 2001: no page no.).

In a statement on Educational savings accounts issued by the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) website in the USA, the authors recommend home educators not to take the money as it will have 'strings attached', for example having to use registered tutors. The HSLDA was established in 1983 with the aim of assisting parents in all aspects of their home education journey. They express their opposition to the voucher programme in the quote below:

> *On principle, homeschooling has succeeded as a movement in part by being different. We have not been like typical constituencies asking for our piece of the public-money pie—we have mostly asked to be left alone. This has fostered one of the most dynamic social movements of our lifetime* (Manson and Jones, 2016).

This position reiterates the notion of seeking exclusion and a position of 'other' mentioned in Chapter 1 (Pattison, 2018). Partaking in government schemes seems contradictory to the unrestricted aspect of home education that appeals to so many. Once again, there is an element of wanting to **step out of the system**.

Summary

In this chapter, I began by presenting literature about the formation of attitudes to school, learning, parenting, and the state. The literature on attitudes covers a diverse range of topics and often, the focus is on consumer choice or political ideologies. Attitudes to schools and parenting have changed dramatically in since the 1980s, as has their representation in the media. Therefore, it was an important to investigate as it forms the backdrop for the study. I then explored how parents make choices about their children's education. The literature shows that choosing a school involves a combination of formal and informal methods (such as 'word of mouth'). Feelings evoked by the information gathered and the settings themselves play a crucial role in decision-making.   Finally, I presented examples of the types of barriers parents face in implementing their choice and how they are overcome. This focussed literature review used the emerging categories of the grounded theory as a lens, had it been carried out before the analysis of the findings, it would have looked very different.

In the next chapter, I draw upon the theories of others to deepen and enrich my grounded theory and explore sociological influences on the decision to **step out of the system**.

Chapter 7: **Stepping out of the System?** A conceptual framework to explore the process of becoming a home or alternative educator

Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the grounded theory I constructed during the study, and incorporate it into a conceptual framework using theories from various disciplines. The grounded theory of **Stepping out of the System?** includes the stages that parents navigate and factors that influence them.

To aid in the description of the theory I would like you to visualise a furrowed landscape.

> *Metaphors are a great aid to understanding, not to be dismissed because they are not strictly scientific. They are low definition concepts, imprecise in detail but unexpectedly revealing in the way we look at things* (Handy, 2015:21).

Stepping out of the System?

Mainstream education has become the default in modern society, a well-worn groove in which it is easy to traverse. The path of least resistance. It is free in the UK, convenient and usually leads to qualifications that allow children to access either the next stage of education, or a job.

The parents in this study commenced their journey to find suitable educational provision laden with thoughts and feelings, the source of these being years of experiences of schools. Their attitudes developed because of memories about their childhood, career, friends, and relatives that are/were teachers and the children of everyone they have ever known. In addition, media coverage of policy changes affecting education, and the way in which the public talk about schools subtly influenced their opinions. Some participants mentioned gut feeling and parenting styles towards which they felt an affinity, such as natural or

attachment parenting. Some had not wanted to send their child to school since the child was a baby, whereas others had only recently found out about home and alternative education.

Those wishing to 'step out of the system' have to remove themselves from this easily accessible groove; or prevent themselves from falling into it. Their **attitudinal direction** has set the co-ordinates, now they just need to find the confidence to follow them. **Attitudinal direction** encompasses opinions on schools, parenting style and learning.

It is likely that many of us who were mainstream schooled feel an affinity for our past groove. Fond memories and a cultural expectation that the government is doing the best for us by providing us with schools reinforce this instinct. Alternatively, feelings could be neutral leading to no strong repulsion caused by negative feelings such as fear or discomfort.

Surveying the landscape means looking outside of the popular, well-worn groove. Not only looking towards other possibilities, but also to the past, and the anticipated future. All aspects of interaction count: every place and person in the past and present is part of the information gathering process. The body responds physiologically to memories of these encounters. In picturing a classroom or a home education experience all previous experiences help form the image and the affect that accompanies it.

If an individual wishes to avoid the mainstream school groove, then they may need to **negotiate obstacles** along the way. Having somebody to advise who has experienced the consequences already, or who is on a parallel journey is certainly reassuring but not always necessary. Online experiences such as reading about home education success stories on forums or watching YouTube clips produced by home educated children/families can be

enough to aid a parent seeking reassurance about where the new groove will lead. Physical or virtual support may provide a 'leg up' but some construct a 'ladder' of their own by setting up activity groups or even an alternative educational setting.

Perhaps there is an alternative groove nearby that they can seamlessly enter? Examples of this might be a network of home educators and activity groups or a different type of provision such as Steiner or a forest school. An affinity toward this new groove would be felt due to finding people with similar attitudes, or simply an environment where the parent or child feels content.   Have they truly **stepped out of the system** though? Steiner schools have very strict protocols that the teachers must follow, forest schools use guidelines, and even home education groups have unspoken rules and exclude certain types of people.

If there is nothing nearby then the parent may search elsewhere for groups and activities. Some participants had large home educating communities nearby whilst others had to look further afield. This is an example of **negotiating obstacles**. The internet has made this process much simpler as online interactions with Facebook groups (e.g. natural parenting, flexi-schooling, baby-wearing) or forums on websites such as MumsNet.com can give immediate answers and suggestions. Online research can also assist if the parents decide to move house as was the case with two of the participants (e.g. P13 felt sure she would be happy in her new location when she saw the types of shops on the high street). Those with extreme repulsion from schools appear to do almost anything to avoid being dragged into the mainstream groove. There is a spectrum of experiences within this category with the most extreme being moving country to access new alternative grooves and/or carving their own: for instance, by home educating or setting up an alternative setting. Entering a place to which we feel repulsion leads to bodily feelings of discomfort. Establishing one's own

alternative setting is the ultimate way of controlling one's environment, and control alleviates the fear of the unknown.

Building a conceptual framework

Once I began building my grounded theory, I sought out literature that related to each of the categories and this triggered ideas about how to advance the theory. I began to see the literature through the lens of **Stepping out of the System?** During the search, I read about theories of decision-making, attitudes, emotions etc. from a variety of disciplines. However, none of them seemed rich enough to incorporate the historical, cultural, and political aspects of home and alternative education. Rather than build upon the grand theories of others, I would use them to build upon mine. Novice researchers may be at risk of misusing frameworks, committing to one too early in the research process or choosing one that is popular 'because we feel that linking our work to current fads will work in our favor with reviewers' (Casanave and Li, 2015:12). This has always been something at the forefront of my mind and I made sure that I spent sufficient time becoming theoretically sensitive before committing to an explanatory framework.

At this point, I will introduce a conceptual framework that draws together the work of Reddy, Bourdieu and Gee. It is likely that I am combining the three for the first time. However, Bourdieu and Gee's ideas surrounding power and discourse have been used together before, for example by Galloway (2015). According to Steinmetz (2011), Bourdieu's theories on *habitus, field* and *capital* are inherently historical so using them in conjunction with Reddy's should be uncontroversial.

In her comprehensive guidance on constructivist Grounded Theory methods, Charmaz (2006) refers to the building of theory as a process of theoretical playfulness. In Chapter 3, I

argued that Grounded Theory was no longer considered purely inductive, and that abductive reasoning was a more realistic and creative approach to use. Thornberg (2012) believes that by being an informed Grounded Theory researcher, we can use abductive reasoning alongside theoretical playfulness and so go 'beyond the "box" of extant theories' (Thornberg, 2012:254). He invites us to use an approach of theoretical pluralism but not to become so distracted by the theories of others that we lose sight of our own data and findings.

Another novice researcher enabled me to feel confident in the use of ideas from different disciplines:

> *Using them together is, effectively, an attempt to undertake a pragmatist negotiation of meaning through allowing (two) previously unrelated concepts to comingle* (Lean, 2019:71).

Alone, Bourdieu, Reddy and Gee do not go far enough in helping me to explain the intricacies of the decision-making process. By blending them, the gaps in my theory of **Stepping out of the System?** can be somewhat filled.

Firstly, I turn to historian William Reddy (2001) who provides a framework that explains how we navigate feelings. I have chosen Reddy's concepts in order to elaborate on the notion identified in my grounded theory that parents have pre-existing attitudes that lead them to seek out alternative educational spaces. These attitudes are affect-laden, and the participants are responsive to their bodily feelings and emotions regarding school and parenting. Reddy (2001) proposes that rules and structures in different societies control emotions via *emotional regimes*. These suppress some individuals, and if emotions and opinions cannot be publicly expressed it can lead to what Reddy terms *emotional suffering*.

Reddy (2001) gives the example of the strict, stifling *emotional regime* under the reign of King Louis XIV which led to meetings of sentimentalists and romantics in salons. There, people could discuss ideas away from the rules and hierarchies that divided groups in society and prevented free interaction; Reddy labels these places *emotional refuges.* When the numbers of individuals making use of *emotional refuges* rapidly increases, they can end up becoming the norm. Therefore, suffering becomes an agent of change. Once King Louis XIV's rule ended, romanticism became the norm and those opposed to it could be sent to the guillotine. 'For a few decades, emotions were deemed to be as important as reason in the foundation of states and the conduct of politics' (Reddy, 2001:143). An example of *emotional suffering* in my research findings is demonstrated where participants do not try to explain their choices to those who will not understand (even to friends and family members). Their suffering may also be due to concerns that school will affect their child's development in some way such as by stifling creativity or overt testing regimes. The most painful suffering is likely to occur if the parent believes the child to be unsafe. *Emotional liberty*, according to Reddy (2001), is achieved when goals are dropped or adapted and emotional suffering relieved. 'Emotional claims are often made in the context of goal conflict. One wants to go camping, but bears have been seen in the woods' (Reddy, 2001:323).

Reddy's (2001) theory describes emotional norms changing throughout history, with examples from different cultures and historical periods. His ideas help explain how small collectives can grow and alter history. I am of the opinion that the development of technologies that facilitate instant international communication can allow virtual refuges to exist and grow. Technology also allows members to broadcast their ideas publicly. Reddy's (2001) framework of navigating emotions is powerful in helping understand how and why

emotional refuges form. It does not, however, acknowledge the fact that, unless financially

independent or provided with resources, individuals cannot remain in refuges permanently.

Most will need to re-enter society and this is a quandary expressed by participants in this

study. Of course, if the *emotional refuges* become the norm then the *emotional regime* will

no longer be an oppressive force. In his review of Reddy's book, Nye (2003) critiques the

reliance on examples from Western upper classes and wonders how well suited the ideas

would be when applied to non-literate cultures elsewhere. In her review, Rosenwein (2002)

also questions whether the theories are applicable to the lower classes, in that

sentimentalism might have become the norm for the upper classes only. However, I feel

Reddy's (2001) concepts are well suited to modern times in which parents feel they ought to

suppress emotions regarding their children attending schools.

Secondly, I outline concepts from Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990a & b, 2000) which help to

explain why parents may wish for their child to enter or remain in specific grooves on the

educational landscape. According to Bourdieu, our experiences of the world become

imprinted from childhood to form our *habitus.*

> *The* habitus [emphasis in original]*, a product of history, produces individual and*
>
> *collective practices-more history-in accordance with the schemes generated by*
>
> *history. It ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each*
>
> *organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to*
>
> *guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably*
>
> *than all formal rules and explicit norms* (Bourdieu, 1990b:54).

The *habitus* is embodied and presents as 'common sense' and 'second nature', operating

without conscious thought to determine appropriate responses to the anticipated future

based on the conditions in which the *habitus* was formed. Sometimes, the *habitus* is not

suited to changing conditions and this can lead to the *hysteresis* effect (Bourdieu, 1990b). A

good example of this is demonstrated by McDonough and Polzer's (2012) study of

organisational change in the Canadian public sector, where those staff more suited to the

old ways of working experienced negative consequences.

The *habitus* is not static but has fluidity. It is possible to change our *habitus*, but this

requires effort. Jo (2013) reported that poorer immigrant parents in Korea who found their

habitus restraining had to modify it in order to give their children a chance in the

competitive environment of their new field of the Korean education system. The majority of

Korean children (as well as immigrant children) attend cram schools or have extra tuition to

gain higher SAT scores and a lucrative market known as 'shadow education' has emerged to

cater for this need.   O'Driscoll (2016) describes this process of conscious change to *habitus*

as 'splintering'. Her constructivist Grounded Theory study focussed on the experiences of

women who had chosen not to have children. Choice, to them was a liberating experience.

I observed similarities in her study to my own, as both of our sets of participants felt judged

and labelled. Hers had to defend their choice not to reproduce as it went against the social

norm.

Bourdieu (2000) writes about the state 'orchestrating' the *habitus* and gives an example to

which most of us can relate: 'the major rhythms of the social calendar, especially that of

school holidays' (Bourdieu, 2000:175).   My research findings illustrated this through the

participants' mentioning being constrained by the timing of the holidays and the school day.

In his study of Kabyle culture there was a strict timetable of when the men should work and

when and where people should be in the village at all times. These unwritten rules make up

Bourdieu's notion of *doxa*. For example, a person who overslept and became out of synch with the others would be looked down upon (Bourdieu, 1977).

Since the introduction of compulsory schooling, it has become *doxic* in many countries and parental work patterns are somewhat influenced by the hours the school is open. The word *doxa* in ancient Greek means common beliefs or knowledge, with the words orthodoxy and heterodoxy being derived from it. Bourdieu expands upon this definition and in his analogy of a game, he states that *doxa* is the belief held by the players. Acceptance of *doxa*, leads to unquestioning conformism to hierarchies of power and exclusion (e.g. of women in certain cultures) (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

> *We need thoroughly to sociologize the phenomenonological analysis of doxa as an uncontested acceptance of the daily lifeworld, not simply to establish that it is not universally valid for all perceiving and acting subjects, but also to discover that, when it realizes itself in certain social positions, among the dominate in particular, it represents the most radical form of acceptance of the world, the most absolute form of conservativism* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:73-4).

Society is comprised of a landscape with many different *fields*. Bourdieu states that a field is not a dead space but a:

> *..space of play* which exists as such only to the extent that players enter into it who believe in and actively pursue the prizes it offers (Bourdieu, 1990a:19).

Unlike a real game where the equipment, players and rules are clear for all to see, and where one may choose to enter or leave, the social *field,* according to Bourdieu (1990b) is something we are born into. Bourdieu gave the unconscious investment in the meaning of

the game the term *illusio* (Bourdieu, 2000). This belief is not borne out by thought alone but by embodied actions. Bourdieu (1990b) describes this as enacted belief which is:

> *…instilled by the childhood learning that treats the body as a living memory pad, an*
>
> *automaton that 'leads the mind unconsciously along with it'* (Bourdieu, 1990b:68).

UK schools place of lot of emphasis on qualifications, prizes, and certificates. Pupils are taught to value symbols as external markers of success and this continues after they have entered the workplace with promotions and high-status jobs being the goal of many people. The *habitus* that some children bring to school enables them to understand the language and procedures they encounter; the *habitus* possessed by others may be less suited to school and therefore sets them up to struggle. (See Reay, 2004 for a critique of the use of *habitus* in education research).

Parental expectations of their children to succeed in certain, valued careers tend to lead to the continuation of social classes that are reproduced generation after generation. According to the interview with Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Waquant (1992), this class reproduction is evidenced in France by surveys on consumption of cultural experiences carried by the Ministry of Culture every four years. Binder et al. (2016) remind us that Bourdieu also believed that university experiences play a role in the desire of prestigious careers, their research focussed on students at Harvard and Stanford Universities in the USA, their Grounded Theory study revealed strategies in the university environment which were the driving force in funnelling students into a small number of prestigious careers

Interestingly, Bourdieu, like Reddy (2001), mentions the word 'suffering' in that the fulfilment of the parental desires of *illusio* 'generally carries on without crises or conflict-though this does not mean without psychological or physical suffering' (Bourdieu,

2000:165). The word 'generally' here applies to the population utilising mainstream

education and I would argue that most of the participants in the present study fall outside

of this generalisation.

The rise in alternative schools and home educating groups is leading to new educational

fields developing where the players can determine their own rules. Two participants in my

study had established their own setting and another said that they considered it. I suggest

that these fields are not free from *doxa* and *illusio* but they are of a slightly different type to

the mainstream. As stated in Chapter 2, they have their own unwritten rules, rituals and

symbols such as the principles to which forest and Steiner schools. Further study in

alternative settings may be able to reveal more about this phenomenon.

 I also propose that internal conflict might be occurring as most home and alternatively

educating parents do still desire eventual academic success and good careers for their

children; however, they typically place the child's happiness as their top priority. This

paradox of not wanting to invest and take part in the game but valuing the meaning of

mainstream educational *illusio* is the source of a more subtle form of *emotional suffering*.

Thinking with Bourdieu enables us to explain why society tends to reproduce itself and that

most citizens play the game via their 'buying into' *illusio*. His assumption is that history

repeats itself, although he rejects determinism as he states:

> *Not only can the habitus be transformed (always within defined boundaries) by effect*
>
> *of social trajectory leading to conditions of living differently from initial ones, it can*
>
> *also be **controlled** [emphasis in original], through awakening of consciousness and*
>
> *socioanalysis'* (Bourdieu, 1990a: 116).

Jenkins (1992) admits in his book on Bourdieu that he does not understand the meaning of this. My interpretation of the 'awakening' is that it is a type of reflexivity. It is evidenced by some of my participants such as P1 who referred to Foucault's notion of 'biopower' and P12 who researched aspects of the purpose of education being like a conveyor belt (and shared some emotive YouTube videos with me). These examples, along with others demonstrate their perception that the participants feel they are being controlled by society and are therefore part of a game. As part of **surveying the landscape,** they have used a form of 'socioanalysis' for example, by researching the effects of school, learning and parenting. Lees' (2011) participant, Lynn, stated that, after being awakened to the possibility of a different mode of education, she could no longer continue to be complicit in the reproduction of the previous structures.

Finding others with a similar view arguably leads to cementing or strengthening their attitudes. The 'awakening' itself may lead to feelings of anxiety and a need to escape. The unsettledness or gut feeling about school that the parents in this study describe could be due to a past fearful experience, or a sense that the needs of the child will not be met by schools. The parent is drawing upon their experience of the world to anticipate how the child will feel. The parents may be aware of their wish to avoid or disengage from the dominant *field* on offer to them; they may even be aware that, to some extent, they can prevent the social reproduction mentioned above. However, if alternatives are too difficult to find or create and/or there are barriers in their way then their motivation may not be quite enough. Threadgold's statement below summarises this and highlights the importance of an affective element in our aspirations.

Considering illusio through intensities and awareness brings forth affective and temporal elements of aspirations, where one may perceive and understand the illusio of the field, but lack realistic strategies and time to be able to pursue the rewards. This formulates an affective economy that has implications for the trajectory towards one's aspirations (Threadgold, 2019:43)*.*

A criticism of Bourdieu is that 'it remains difficult to understand how, in Bourdieu's model of practice, actors or collectives can intervene in their own history in any substantial pattern' (Jenkins, 1992:83). Even being part of a collective aiming to change society means operating within boundaries, as the range of possibilities are themselves socially constructed. According to Calhoun 'Revolution did not mark a break from the habitus but was based on it, even though it broke the pattern of stable reproduction' (1993:75). Reay (2004) has a similar interpretation of Bourdieu but with her emphasis on individuals having limited possibilities for change. The quote below shares similarities with my vision of a landscape of options, but importantly, Reay reminds us that these are not without bounds.

I envisage habitus as a deep, interior, epicentre containing many matrices. These matrices demarcate the extent of choices available to any one individual. Choices are bounded by the framework of opportunities and constraints the person finds himself/herself in, her external circumstances (Reay, 2004:435).

The participants may have a strongly anti-school attitude but could simply be unable to dedicate the time and resources that home education requires. In some cases, it might even entail breaking the law.

Garnham (1993) noted that Bourdieu's theories failed to acknowledge the consumption of mass media and television. He believes these can break through traditional class patterns as they are accessible to almost all. Developments in internet technology subsequent to

Garnham's (1993) essay have facilitated an even greater mass uptake of information, enabling individuals across classes to share ideas, advertise products and even produce artefacts such as art, films, music and books without censorship or management. Calhoun (1993) is of the opinion that Bourdieu's theories 'show insufficient attention to the nature of mediation, the constitution of actors, and the modes of co-ordinating action in contemporary large, complex societies' (Calhoun, 1993:84). Garnham (1993) states that there has been a 'widely recognised breakdown of modes of social solidarity - the decline of political parties, trade unions, associations of all sorts - in favour of an increasingly individualized and fragmented social world of shifting interest and taste groups' (Garnham, 1993:189). The rise of social media and the polarisation of opinions it seems to fuel, has furthered this trend. More recently, internet technology has allowed groups with shared ideas to form alliances, as I will elaborate on later with help from Gee (2004). Many groups are operating autonomously, away from the regulation of broadcasting standards and news agencies that previously controlled production.

Change, from Bourdieu's viewpoint means increasing expectations and moving up the social ladder. However, not everybody perceives higher social status as a marker of success. Improvement to some may be the deliberate rejection of financial rewards in the pursuit of more free time for creative endeavours as is demonstrated in Threadgold's (2018) analysis of Australia's DIY punk scene. In the present study, P21 is a very good example of a parent who has no interest in her children gaining traditional qualifications as she prioritises their acquisition of life skills and healthy coping mechanisms.

Although concepts such as *habitus* and *doxa* help in explaining why it may be difficult to enter new *fields* (e.g. types of school), Bourdieu's ideas do not fully explain why some people feel great discomfort at the thought of their children being part of 'the system'.

Reay (2015) argues that Bourdieu demonstrates a psychosocial understanding of *habitus* in his writing when he uses terms such as suffering and emotion, but there is a sense of brevity in his writing on this subject. The short amount that he does contribute is to the point and in this simple, bracketed statement, his opinion is made clear *'(and nothing is more serious than emotion, which touches the depths of our organic being)'* (Bourdieu, 2000:140).

Bourdieu (2000) himself calls for further research (that combines sociology and psychology) on how the initial investment in a *field* develops. This, he feels begins through socialisation of a child in the family home. The role of emotions as a driving force in society is made clear by his use of the word libido to represent a non-sexual desire.

> *Bourdieu's concept of socialized desire could then account for the emotionally charged investments that emerge in the dialectic exchange between the body and its environment* (Aarseth, 2016:106)*.*

I draw upon James Paul Gee's (2004) concept of *affinity spaces* to elaborate on the principle of parents feeling a sense of relief or comfort when they find 'people like them'. Gee states that *affinity spaces* can be actual physical venues or online. The members of these spaces may not be geographically located or from the same age group or social class, but they communicate due to a shared interest or belief. Neely and Marone (2016) classified parking lots as an *affinity space* where fans of certain music genres gather after gigs. I would argue that there is some overlap between the two concepts as *affinity spaces* become *emotional refuges* when people feel they cannot speak comfortably about things in public. I would categorise mental health forums, divorce support sites, conspiracy theorist sites and some aspects of parenting websites as being *affinity spaces*. Gee's (2004) examples are fanfiction and gaming websites but they could be any sort of hobby, activist or political group. Affinity

is a chemistry term brought into the world of fiction and philosophy by authors such as Goethe and Weber. Goethe was originally a biologist who, ahead of Darwin, made painstaking observations about the characteristics and similarities between organisms. Goethe's book entitled *Elective affinities* contains characters that discuss people's attraction towards one another using chemistry analogies, such as mercury droplets being drawn together or oil and water not mixing (Bell, 2014). Weber uses the term 'elective affinity' to theorise the grouping of people with similar ideologies an example being his analysis of the protestant church. McKinnon (2010) provides a strong argument to suggest that Weber was greatly influenced by his reading of Goethe.

The antithesis of Gee's notion of *affinity spaces* would be fields where individuals feel a sense of discomfort or even repulsion. This may seem like a strong term to use but when examined from a scientific angle it is merely the tendency for objects to move away from each other. In the current study, this relates to the parents who feel repulsion from schools. Reay (2015) uses Bourdieu's theories on the attractions and repulsions of bodies to describe how white middle class children do not connect easily with working class and ethnic minority peers.

Duncan and Hayes (2012, cited in Bommarito, 2014) called for more research into how affinity groups change and evolve. I have noted that Gee (2004) does not discuss how members of affinity groups feel or what motivates them to remain. Bommarito (2014) made similar observations and used empirical research of others to theorise on affinity spaces. He identified problems such as belongingness, boundaries, and focus, and went on to develop a situated model of affinity spaces. His model facilitates analysis of the breakdown of affinity groups for reasons such as the focus becoming too broad. Finally, Gee

does not expect that the-often niche-interests of these groups will become mainstream. For this reason, I integrate Gee's ideas with Reddy and Bourdieu's. In the following section, I will describe how using the three authors in combination with my grounded theory enables the journey to becoming a home educator to be positioned amongst wider socio-cultural and historical theories.

Bringing the concepts together

Once the parents have 'stepped out of the system', they and their child(ren) inhabit an alternative space; either physical or virtual. These are the grooves in our metaphorical landscape; some deep and well populated and others freshly carved. The three conceptual models provided by Reddy (2001), Gee (2004) and Bourdieu (1990, 2000) have common themes that I have identified to help explain the properties of these spaces. They are shared ideas, comfort/avoiding discomfort, and unwritten rules. The first two are attributes that confer a positive feeling and the third is a possible source of tension.   These factors help explain the reasons parents may be drawn to specific 'grooves' in their landscapes and want to stay in them or are repelled by others. In this section, I use these concepts from Reddy, Bourdieu and Gee to enrich my grounded theory. By integrating their ideas, I demonstrate how the journeys of individual parents fit into a broader context and how changes to the make-up of society may eventually occur. The theories of these other authors did not serve to change my grounded theory but they do extend and deepen it, enabling a better understanding of the journey taken by potentially home and alternatively educating parents.

Shared ideas

When a new idea is in its infancy, there may only be a small number of people who agree or think that way. Before digital communication, it may have been difficult to find others who choose to go against the grain. Recently, there seems to be public interest in celebrity home educators such as Emma Thompson and Charlotte Church. Nadia Sawalha has a YouTube channel on which she has answered questions about home education; she also appeared on television and in the press regarding the subject (Gordon, 2016). The isolated protests of a very small number of families just forty years ago have now become a legitimate sector of education in North America and:

> *As homeschooling diversifies, newer recruits tend to be closer to the cultural mainstream, seeking individualised attention for their children, reflecting the culture of intensive parenting* (Aurini & Davies, 2005:471).

The parents in my study who held fond memories of past school days being less formal, have a *habitus* that conflicts with their expectations: that modern schooling is subject to a strict curriculum and compulsory testing. What they value does not match what they imagine their children will experience. For those with negative attitudes about their own school experience, their *habitus* provides them with a prediction that school will still possess these, sometimes damaging, attributes. Discussing their opinions online or face to face enables them to feel validated as others share their point of view. They seek to change the *habitus* of their child by providing a different educational environment. Thus, they enter a new *field* and prevent the ongoing reproduction of society from one generation to the next: for example, in the case of P12 whose children had started to mix with international families they would not normally have encountered in the local schools.

*We can embrace new opportunities outside the traditional habitus. We can have exposure to alternative life experiences and create a new habitus. As individual liberated agents with new knowledge and experiences, we can make new choices, create new practices, and together with others sow the seeds of wider social transformation (*O'Driscoll, 2016:151)*.*

Those with positive memories of schools from their childhood may be attempting to recreate this. However, is difficult to tell from prospectuses and online information whether or not staff in schools share parental ideas. Once P20 decided to visit her local school, she found that the head teacher shared her values concerning testing and her anxiety was relieved. Her goals were adapted and as Reddy (2001) predicted, *emotional liberty* resulted. If the ideologies of the group are in alignment with their own, then a feeling of connectedness might be expected. Five of my participants mentioned that some home education groups might be too alternative; they did not want to seem too much like 'hippies' or to feel that others considered them to be a 'hippy' because of their choice. Home is the ultimate *affinity space* if all members of the family have the same beliefs. Rather than use the whole of Gee's (2004) theory, I believe that only the concept of affinity to be suitable here. It leads us to think of the opposite force in science-repulsion. We feel repelled by certain people whose views are strongly opposed to ours; thus, if we do not feel understood or welcome then discomfort will motivate us to move on. For instance, P18 found that people were not engaging with her online and, when she moved to Belfast, she found home educating people had very different views; it seemed that most were doing it for religious reasons and were not very political. She found she was on the 'same page' as the NCT mums. P6 did not feel part of the home educating community in her area that the childminder was attending so she felt 'a bit of an outsider' in addition to being 'non-British

and queer'. She also believed that groups were all comprised of couples. The feelings

evoked by finding an *emotional refuge* either physical or virtual leads to the next common

theme of comfort or avoiding discomfort.

Comfort/avoiding discomfort

Groups that share common beliefs and goals experience positive affect. These groups do

not have to meet face-to-face, and Gee's (2004) notion of *affinity spaces* illustrates bonds

forming by individuals sharing interests online. I believe the parents who choose

alternatives to school have the opposite of affinity; repulsion from the easily accessible

mainstream groove. They **survey the landscape** to find somewhere alternative which they

consider to be suitable. Some carve out their own groove by educating the child themselves

or even by setting up an alternative school, while others may then feel an affinity to this

novel groove. P7 stated that she did not feel an affinity to her local school despite never

having entered the building. This aspect of the alternative solutions found overlaps slightly

with the presence of shared ideas, however, it is distinct because comfort or discomfort

may be felt without the presence other people. The physical properties of a building may

promote negative affect as in the case of P21, who, when looking around a high school with

low ceilinged, narrow corridors knew that this would cause her son to feel anxious.

Being drawn to a certain path in life can often be due to the feelings evoked in an individual.

The person is anticipating how they, or their child, will feel in the new situation based on

their past experiences. Bourdieu does not help us understand how affect can move

individuals away from one social field into another but in a footnote on emotion in The Logic

of Practice, he gives insight into the power of emotion to enable one to envisage the future:

Emotion… is a (hallucinatory) 'present-ing' of the impending future, which, as bodily reactions identical to those of the real situation bear witness, leads a person to live a still suspended future as already present, or even already past, and therefore necessary and inevitable – 'I am a dead man'; 'I am done for.' (Bourdieu, 1990b: 292)

In the chapter of Pascalian Meditations entitled 'Bodily Knowledge', Bourdieu (2000) creates a vision analogous to the parents in this study shaping their environment or groove.

Guided by one's sympathies and antipathies, affections and aversions, tastes and distastes, one makes for oneself an environment in which one feels "at home" and in which one can achieve the fulfilment of one's desire to be which one identifies with happiness' (2000:150).

In one, simple sentence he summarises the parental pursuit of a place that feels right. Examples to illustrate his point from this study could be distaste of schools, sympathy for the child's wellbeing, affection for a natural style of learning and an overall desire for a less stressful way of life. Of course, feeling at home does not necessarily mean being in the home and could refer to alternative spaces and outdoor learning.

In my analysis, I identified gut feelings and unsettledness as playing a role in the decision to home educate. Bourdieu explored the embodied aspects of society and I propose that the gut feelings mentioned in my study differ from one individual to the next due to the concept of *habitus*. These ingrained dispositions give individuals their 'feel for the game' and lead to tastes and preferences. Parents may be seeking an environment or staff members that fit with their *habitus*. They may feel uncomfortable in settings unfamiliar to their *habitus.* Bourdieu (1990) discusses the effect of affinity of *habitus:*

The surest guarantor of homogamy and thereby, of social reproduction, is the
spontaneous affinity (experienced as a feeling of friendly warmth) which brings
together agents endowed with dispositions or tastes that are similar, and thus
produced from similar social conditions and conditioning (Bourdieu, 1990a:71).

Alternatively, they may be striving to transform their *habitus*. Bourdieu states that within
defined boundaries, social conditions can be changed, and that habitus can be '*controlled*
through awakening of consciousness and socioanalysis' (Bourdieu, 1990a:116 emphasis in
original). Parents who are critical of schools have often researched their reasons thoroughly
and show an awareness of sociology, politics, and child psychology. They are not simply
reacting to their bodily feelings but have combined them with their attitudes and research.
Of course, strong feelings may lead to more intensive research away from the institution
they are uncomfortable with. Bourdieu, albeit briefly, brings together the role of emotion
and the body in stating that childhood learning instils in us movements and tendencies
which become enacted beliefs.

The body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mines grief. It does not represent
what it performs; it does not memorize the past, it enacts [emphasis in original] *the*
past, bringing it back to life. What is "learned by the body" is not something that one
has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is (Bourdieu,
1990b:73).

William Reddy provides the term *emotional suffering,* and it is this suffering that I believe,
drives some parents to make dramatic changes to their circumstances. Finding others who
feel the same way provides a sense of relief, for example in places where one can safely
express feelings and opinions-*emotional refug*es (Reddy, 2001). In some cases, the refuges

are physical places as in the examples of German home educators leaving the country (Francis-Pape and Hall, 2013) and those participants in my data who found or created a space in which to educate their child (e.g. Participants 1-8 and P13). For the black families in Field-Smith and Williams' (2009) study, the authors believed home education to be a place of refuge from racial stereotypes. Lees (2011) describes the suffering as a form of despair for families who wish to home educate in countries where it is illegal. Probyn (2004) writes that these strong affective reactions are what motivates individuals to enact change.

Feelings of discomfort are evident in my findings where parents do not try to explain their choices to those who will not understand. Pattison (2018) noted self-censorship to be common in that home educating parents sometimes hid their choices from outsiders. In addition, they might even warn their child not to mention being home educated.

The discovery of like-minded people in virtual or actual spaces provides validation, and knowing they are not the only one with these ideas is reassuring thus relieving *emotional suffering*. One of the reasons these spaces feel more relaxed is that they are free from the pressures of the *illusio* that is common in mainstream education such as curriculum demands, competitive testing, stickers and rewards found in UK primary schools. Either that or the different form of *illusio* that is valued in the spaces is less likely to cause stress to these parents. For example, P12 placed the relationship between her daughters high on her list of priorities while P13 wanted her son to learn about nature and the seasons. P14 believed her parents 'see alternative education as less credible because there aren't as many certificates involved'. Lees (2011) found that by avoiding tests and targets, her autonomously educating participants had lowered their stress. She suggests that the

discovery of elective home education 'induces *the possibility* for such ways of living peacefully' (2011:162 emphasis in original).

According to Bourdieu (2000), individuals take a break from *illusio* by participating in 'free-time' activities that are non-competitive. He includes spending time with family and holidays. Modern holidays often do have some pressure attached, however, and Bourdieu (2000) provides examples such as bringing back souvenirs and a suntan. P21's method of home educating continued the school-style structure throughout the day but with mindful, calm activities after a period of learning such as reading and then afternoon topic-based activities that were playful and creative in nature. Of course, some home educators illustrated in the literature follow traditional curricula and pursue academic success but the only example of this in the present study was P8 whose daughters attended a fee-paying high school after their forest-type primary education.

The parents hope for their child to feel an affinity to the groove that has been chosen for them. However, the child's attitudes and feelings may not be the same as the parents'. By restricting the number of other children they meet, the parents may well be limiting the types of social groups and interactions the child will experience. This might mean they do not develop certain sides of their personality and may miss the opportunity to find affinity groups of their own which could be a source of potential discomfort. For example, P15's daughter asked to go to school part-time after complaining there were no girls her own age in the home education groups they attended; she was not feeling an affinity towards the other children. P7 used the word 'affinity' given that she did not feel this in the context of her local schools. She had not visited the inside of them but had phoned one to enquire about flexi-schooling and been refused. Her daughter asked about going to school but P7

believed that she was just interested in the wearing of a uniform. This is an example of the child showing an affinity towards the idea of going to school, but is based on her perception of what school is about, rather than visiting or knowing about the inside of the school. Uniforms are such a dominant visual representation of UK school life that, at the age of 4, P7's child had subconsciously bought into this aspect of mainstream educational *doxa* and *illusio*.

To continue with one's desires in difficult circumstances may result in *emotional suffering*. Examples of goal conflict in home educating parents may be that they want their child to attend an alternative school but cannot afford it, or that their partner does not approve of their ideas. P7 wished she could afford forest schooling but accepted that she could not. Her goals were modified upon discovering that the part-time alternative provider accepted childcare vouchers. P7 was unsure of how long this would last, while P13 was also only able to afford alternative education (Steiner) near her home via the nursery voucher scheme. Once she knew this was ending, she began to look for cost-free options, eventually relocating the whole family to pursue this goal.

Parents are attempting to provide both a suitable educational setting and a comfortable emotional environment (for themselves and their children). Their feelings about various settings play a part in guiding the way. For some, the situation which they thought would be a suitable school turns out to be a place of discomfort.   An example of this is shown in Myers and Bhopal's (2018) case study in which a Muslim pupil experienced racist bullying when the parents moved to a white middle class area. Being of a mixed-race background and originating from a traveller site led to bullying when P7 attended a school in Wales. Clearly, victims of bullying suffer extreme *emotional suffering*.

Unwritten rules

Bourdieu (2000) uses the term *doxa* to conceptualise the taken for granted rules of each *field* for example scientific *fields* will have different rules to artistic ones. The rules in online home education groups, or who is accepted into a physical group may to lead to self-censorship as parents feel they have to share the opinions of the other members. There are overlaps here with Reddy's (2001) framework, but rather than specific *fields*, Reddy's concepts can be applied to a whole society or culture. An example of an *emotional regime* (Reddy, 2001) could be enforcement of the law in a country where home education is illegal or, at the other end of the spectrum, it could be that members of the public frown upon those not making use of mainstream schools. At an institutional level, the fact that access to colleges and universities is reliant on having taken certain exams could be deemed to be properties of a regime, as the children without certificates are deemed to be inferior and are denied access. They are not playing the game and do not have the symbols of achievement that society requires to access the next level. Most home and alternatively educating parents desire eventual academic success and good careers for their children, however they often place the child's happiness as their top priority. They temporarily or permanently reject the mainstream education *illusio,* instead expressing and valuing *illusio* of a different type such as individualism and experiences. Mirroring my data, Morton (2010) found home educators who also expressed the contradiction of their children being free to follow their own path but also having to earn a living. This is one of the reasons for the question mark at the end of **Stepping out of the System?** The parents may wish to be out of the game but there are signs that they wish to join at a later date or perhaps partially play.

Dissonance between the values held by the parents, and what society perceives to be of importance are prevalent in the data presented in Chapter 5. For example, when choosing

schools to apply for, the majority of parents in the general population look for high academic standards (Gorard et al., 2003). Schools strive to do well in exam league tables and Ofsted inspections and proudly display the results on websites/prospectuses; it is an unwritten rule that being higher in a league table is the marker of a successful school. The participants in this study who were considering home or alternative education, however, looked for other things such as outdoor space, creativity and a culture that is not focussed on testing and external rewards. They wished for their child to be seen as an individual and most believed that schools have a one-size-fits-all approach.

The unwritten rules *or doxa* of a refuge could be confining in themselves and the parents could potentially end up 'caged' by them. Stepping out of mainstream education but into alternatives such as the Steiner group of schools also brings with it a set of rules and regulations. According to Crossley (2001) an affective grip or metaphorically speaking-a gravity-binds social actors to their *field* and there is a 'weight' felt as their decisions and actions have meaning. Designing a groove of one's own is a way to remove the weight felt by the pressure of this. Alternative educators in the UK are able to create their own meaning and rules; which must be a very freeing experience for those feeling constraint. The pressure experienced in adhering to unwritten rules in a refuge is likely to cause less discomfort than the written and unwritten ones present in mainstream schools as the parents have chosen these using different criteria and may find it easier to leave the group and seek another. Of course, if strong social bonds have formed with other parents and children, then this may outweigh any negative elements present.

An example of unwritten rules prevalent in home education forums and website groups is the sanctions reported by Fensham-Smith (2017) such as being ostracised or banned for

expressing opinions that go against the grain. A common distrust of local authorities and the government as a whole was expected as an opinion. Another is one of Nelson's (2013) interviewees who was told she must not bring sweets to a vegetarian group's meetings. The *illusio* of the online home education groups may be that they all value the child's happiness and individual development over academic success.

Home educators committed to an unstructured approach buy into the benefits of learning naturally through life. They reject the traditions and symbols prevalent in mainstream schools. Alternatively, they may feel they have indifference to mainstream educational *illusio* as they refuse to play 'the game'. Their children, however, will eventually need to know the rules if they are to gain access to all of the opportunities mainstream society offers.

The unwritten rules may be indicative of a form of *illusio* within the refuges that differs from the rest of society. Alternatively, parents may be seeking a temporary break from mainstream *illusio* for their child. The rise in parents wanting their child to 'step out of the system' may be indicative of a wider problem in society such as a realisation that the high-stakes, competitive environment for children and teachers is causing some form of distress.

Upon entering the new *field* of alternative educational modalities Lees' 'research participants speak of ways in which they find themselves in strange new worlds where different laws and meaning apply' (2011:189). This echoes my observation that the grooves on the landscape have different forms of *illusio* and often unwritten rules.

A visual representation

Serendipity has played a significant role in my research process. Whilst reading about my other passion, biology, I stumbled upon an image that represents my grounded theory

beautifully. I felt excitement when I first saw it: previously I had used photographs of ripples in sand for some presentations, but I knew something was not right as the grooves were parallel and of the same depth.

Waddington's (1957) image represents an undifferentiated cell's ability to transform into many types as it rolls down a metaphorical grooved landscape and can take different paths. Cells can become one of many types due to differentiation occurring as different genes are expressed (switched on) during development. For example, a cell in the skin would not need to activate the genes coding for digestive enzymes. The recently emerged *field* of epigenetics has surprised many in showing that our genome is not fixed. The environment can cause genes to be switched on and off, even before birth and in previous generations. In my grounded theory, the parent and child are the ball at the top of the slope, and the grooves are the different paths they can take. The environment in each of these will differ and have an effect on both parent and child. Not only because of the academic possibilities available but also the amount of stress felt along the way. To some extent, the child could move from one groove to another or tunnel between. Cells can now be chemically stimulated to differentiate into different types (move to different grooves) which opens up a huge amount of medical applications. A cell can even be chemically 'pushed' backwards to the top of the landscape to start again; it becomes a stem cell. This is where the analogy differs from my theory, as unfortunately, once school days are over, they can never be recreated although formal education can still be returned to at any stage of life (for example, access courses for university).
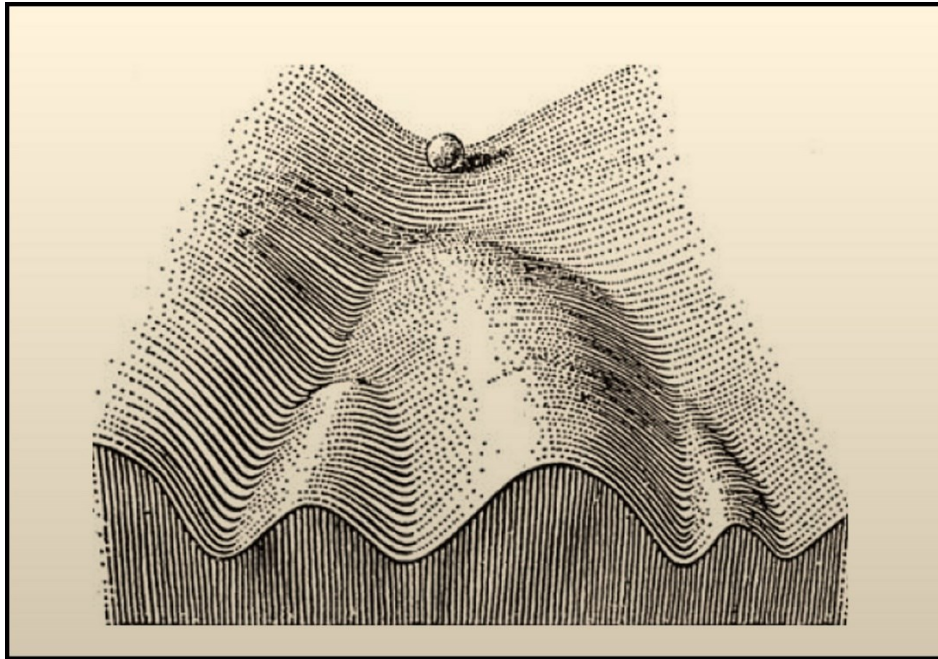
(Waddington, 1957 in Carey, 2012)

Cases to illustrate the grounded theory

In this section, I return to the data to illustrate the stages of the grounded theory using a small sample of vignettes. The reason for this is that the quotations I chose for Chapter 5 were only small parts of the interview transcripts. In the analysis, I removed them from the rest of the participants' words and grouped them into the categories and subcategories. Here, I tell the stories of individual families who, despite having very different situations, embark on a very similar journey.

A groove far away

P13's **attitudinal direction** was anti-school. She felt that her past-experience of school had taken away her love of learning. As a family, they enjoyed the outdoors and growing their own food; she was not invested in mainstream educational *illusio*. After hearing about the Steiner philosophy from a teacher friend, her son joined a Steiner kindergarten (funded by

nursery vouchers). P13 felt a strong affinity as the ethos of the school was similar to that of her own beliefs on child rearing; Steiner schools offer no formal education until the age of seven, lots of outdoor time and learning about the seasons and nature. Having a similar outlook to the educators conveyed a very comforting feeling; the Steiner Kindergarten became an *emotional refuge*. P13 was concerned that her child would follow the more badly behaved children in her local mainstream schools as he tended to gravitate towards the more boisterous children and was even coming home from Steiner kindergarten talking about shooting and killing. This incident did not deter P13 in her praise of the setting and Steiner philosophies.   Financially, the family was unable to use this local Steiner school after the childcare vouchers ended. P13 put a huge amount of effort into **surveying the landscape** to find something suitable. Home education was considered and she began planning that route as she was determined that her children would not go to the local schools. A small number of state-funded Steiner schools are dotted about the country and P13 and her husband decided to sell their house and rent one in the catchment of one three hours away. No **obstacle** was too large. This meant giving up her network of friends and clients and starting again. P13's story illustrates the powerful repulsion of one groove and the determination to enter one that meets all of the requirements at any cost. P13's husband worked in a position that was flexible and moving location has not disrupted his career. This facilitated an easier transition, and it would be interesting to know if the move would have been made, had he been in a more traditional, fixed location job.

When the groove is the family home

P12 was very happy with her four children at home. When her eldest daughter started school, she felt the relationship between them changed. Her eldest daughter was succeeding at school but P12 disliked the quantity of homework and pressure to perform.

P12 herself did well in the school system and completed a degree in social work, but feels she did what was expected of her. She began to question aspects of life that should be a choice; for instance, not having a caesarean section with subsequent children. At the time of our last contact, she was questioning her career as a social worker as she wondered if homes should be private places.   With each subsequent child she had, she changed her **attitude** to parenting from 'super nanny' style to one that could be described as more natural. She breastfed the younger ones for increasing amounts of time and found that opinions at parenting groups changed as she got older and mixed with different types of parents.   P12's **surveying the landscape** phase was mainly to convince her reticent partner that their children should be home educated. P12 found YouTube clips about schools destroying creativity and ones by successfully home educated teens. P12 influenced a friend in her decision to home educate and dipped into community groups but mainly enjoyed the close family dynamic. P12 has faced **obstacles** such as her friends being openly critical about her decision; they were very much invested in the mainstream educational *illusio*. She stopped telling people who would not understand; this is a sign of the *emotional regime* pushing people to seek *emotional refuge*. When outside of the home, P12 met with small numbers of other home educators and was very enthusiastic about the fact that her children were meeting people from other cultures. In her area, people do not move far from their small town.

It took P12 a while to slowly convince her partner, he did not offer to help her educate the children despite being a student himself. She felt she had to prove to him that the children were doing some traditional learning. If he decided that they should stop home educating then she said she would comply as she valued her relationship with him. He was the main **obstacle** she had to overcome though they have not had to move house and financially they

are in the same position, given that she was not in work following the birth of her youngest child. She would have to give up her position as a social worker but seemed happy with that choice.

When the groove is a nostalgic place that no longer exists

P14 had insight into modern schooling as she and her partner were qualified teachers. Her **attitude** to school was that it has changed since she was a child. She had very fond memories of growing up in the countryside and being able to engage in risky play that was still considered safe. Moving to a city suburb meant she did not feel her child would be safe while playing outside. She could not access the types of small village schools that she attended. P14 did not want to be at home educating her child all day, as she thought this would be oppressive for the child. She was relieved when she found a website written by somebody with similar ideas about travelling with children and rights of the child. Websites where parents can freely express these ideas provide both an *affinity space* and *emotional refuge.* The discovery of a like-minded individual was liberating for P14 as all of the other parents she met judged schools by their academic success; she did not share their investment into the *illusio* of test scores. She **surveyed the landscape** to seek alternatives to school and followed her feelings. She mentioned the idea of setting up her own school at an agricultural college. Unfortunately, her younger child became seriously ill and they had to move very near a specialist hospital. This made her value their time together as a family more and she intended to continue home educating her son until they were sure their daughter was fully recovered. P14 had already considered the **obstacles to be negotiated**; their family was willing to sell their house and travel before their child became ill. P14 and her husband had the support of each other and were not concerned that their own parents did not understand.

When the community exerts a strong pull into its groove

All of the other participants had reasons to dislike aspects of their local schools and a community who considered their choices to not utilise mainstream school alternative and/or harmful. P17 felt happy in her former groove as a pupil and became a geography teacher. Her family believed in the power of education and as refugees, greatly valued and appreciated the mainstream provision in European countries. Her parents invested into popular mainstream education *illusio* and were proud that their children had professional careers. Other mothers at her mosque were attempting to entice her out of the mainstream groove to become home educators as it was common in their community and had therefore become part of their *habitus*. Their opinion on the damage school can cause instilled in her a feeling of guilt, fear and self-doubt. P17 found that she could not express positive opinions of schools in this space so although it was an *affinity space* in terms of religion, friendship and parenting support, it was not an *emotional refuge*. For the others in the group of mothers it did constitute a refuge as their **attitudinal direction** was strongly anti-school. As a result of these interactions, P17 went on her own fact-finding mission including reading books and consulting the internet. She also began looking around her as well as into her past, thus **surveying the landscape**. She felt that teachers were well qualified to teach their subject and that she would not be able to teach maths. She also saw children in a tuition centre she helped at whom she believed would have been diagnosed with learning difficulties in a mainstream school. Her **attitudinal direction** was naturally toward mainstream school and the evidence she found reinforced this already held belief. Her affinity toward her community was not strong enough to pull her away as she had no repulsion from school. P17 had no practical **obstacles to negotiate**. Financially they could afford for her to stay away from work, her husband would have fully supported her

decision; also, she had access to other people who were home educating. Her **attitudinal direction**, particularly regarding a perceived negative impact of learning without teachers, could not be overturned during the **surveying the landscape** stage. She felt confident in her decision and in the end did not need an *emotional refuge* as, once her **surveying the landscape** stage was over, she did not feel any anxiety at the idea of her child attending her local school.

When the obstacles are removed

In March 2020, all UK schools closed due to the Covid-19 outbreak. The media reported that many parents struggled to entertain/supervise their children at home. P21 took this opportunity to try out full-time home education. She and her husband had been thinking about home education for years, but did not want to lose one of their wages as financial worries would be too much on top of the other stresses associated with raising three adopted children with extreme behavioural and learning needs, work was the main **obstacle needing negotiating**. Her husband had already changed his hours to 6am-2pm in order to collect the children from school, but there were often times P21 would take her middle child to breakfast club only to be called at work to collect him as he was too upset to go to school. In September 2019, P21 had some time off with stress and had decided to go part time as the family's therapy required half a day a week of their time. In January 2020, P21 decided to leave her teaching job despite enjoying it and it helping her have a sense of identity. This move coincided with her husband gaining promotions and pay rises. They had still not decided to home educate but being at home removed the pressure for the middle child to go into school when he was unhappy.

Originally, P21 had a pro school **attitudinal direction** she never felt unhappy in school herself and trained to be firstly a music teacher, and then a teacher of children with autism. Initially, the couple were happy to send all three children to their local school assuming that all primaries were similar. This turned out not to be the case and the eldest boy was eventually moved to a special primary school and subsequently high school (although the parents had to fight for this, as he was the top end of their ability despite being seven years behind his chronological age). In the first primary school, the middle son was often labelled as being naughty rather than the school examining the underlying reasons for said behaviour. P21's **parenting style** is that she follows the PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) method recommended by their therapists. The family have been attending 'relaxing kids' sessions for a number of years and she is very aware that learning cannot take place if the children feel anxious.

Surveying the landscape of mainstream primary schools led to discussions with the head of SEN at their LA who recommended a primary school and the teachers were trained in working with children who had trauma, the family's therapists were also invited to speak to staff. Despite the school making changes to accommodate the children, class sizes were very large (35-40) and due to being unable to learn in a classroom environment, they would either be with an adult one to one or doing work that is meaningless. Surveying the four local mainstream high schools for her middle son involved attending open evenings, a private tour and speaking to teachers and parents. In one, she felt the low ceilings and narrow corridors would be unsuitable for her son, in all of the others she felt that despite having excellent Ofsted reports, the teachers had no positive methods of assisting her child with his very specific needs.

Following her feelings and having empathy for the children has led to P21 fighting to obtain a place for the middle son in the nurture group of a special high school despite him being academically too able to be there. She will continue to home educate her youngest daughter for the next academic year as she feels her daughter will be unable to cope with year six work. She would have liked to continue to home educate all three, but the behaviour of the boys could be very difficult and the school Head Teacher did not agree when she inquired about flexi-schooling. P21 feels the happiness of her children to be paramount and has already noticed that her youngest is having fewer toileting accidents; is no longer calling out regularly in the night; and is enjoying playing with dolls and sensory activities as a child of her developmental age would be allowed to do if they were in nursery or reception.

The family have **received the support** of local services for looked after and adopted children but have had to fight for what they need. They cannot access any funding apart from the therapy despite been entitled to 25 plus hours of one-to-one support for each child in school. They have been able to change their **work** situations and would **relocate the family** if the special school they have found did not suit their children. They have already moved house in order to have a larger garden, as the children cannot play unattended outside and often have incidents with other children on play parks.

Summary

In this chapter, I have brought together the grounded theory constructed from the findings of the study and presented it alongside the concepts of others. The use of ideas from

Reddy, Bourdieu and Gee enabled the metaphorical journey to be extended further and the properties of the alternative space inhabited explored.

I have proposed that parents wish to escape the 'system' to seek *emotional refuge* for themselves and their children. The refuges offer protection from various aspects of control implemented in schools; from the testing and reward systems to the influence of others and the chaotic school run. Properties the refuges have in common include providing a feeling of comfort, shared ideas with other members and unwritten rules. The unwritten rules may be indicative of a form of *illusio* within the refuges that differs from the rest of society. The unwritten rules may be a source of tension if everyone is not in agreement, they may even cause some to feel excluded from these groups and therefore not able to feel that they are in an emotional refuge. Alternatively, parents may be seeking a temporary break from *illusio* for their child. The rise in parents wanting their child to **step out of the system** may be indicative of a wider problem in society. The feeling that the high-stakes, competitive environment for children and teachers is causing some form of distress and that the schools that are available are not suitable for every type of child.

Introduction

In this thesis, I endeavoured to investigate factors affecting the process of becoming a home or alternative educator. After thoroughly analysing the themes of initial exploratory interviews, I posed the emergent research questions:

1. What are parents' motivations for investigating the possibility of home/alternative education?

2. How and why do potential home/alternative educators gather information about alternatives to mainstream education?

3. What barriers do parents face in implementing their choice and how do they overcome them?

These questions were determined following interviews with home educators who made use of a part-time alternative educational setting. As per the principles of Grounded Theory methods, I carried out theoretical sampling and recruited 21 participants in total who were at various stages of considering or engaging in their home education journey. By determining relationships between the categories and the core category (that was the main concern of all of the participants), I formed a substantive grounded theory named **Stepping out of the system?** In Chapter 7, I presented the theory with the aid of a metaphor; a furrowed landscape that the participants, along with their children, were navigating. Movement between the grooves was possible by tunnelling between but they could not traverse back up the landscape. The answers to the research questions are found within the description of the participants' journey.

The core process of my grounded theory is entitled **Stepping out of the system**. This phrase encompasses what the majority of the participants were attempting to do. Almost all of the parents made use of the terms 'system' and 'institution'. One believed school to be like a 'regime'. The core process is comprised of three main categories: **attitudinal direction, surveying the landscape** and **negotiating obstacles**. The categories were developed from themes identified after the exploratory interviews. The research questions were determined as more parents described their journey using similar terms.

Parents have opinions of school, learning and parenting that developed before they began to consider how to educate their child. **Attitudinal direction** is the term I utilised for this, although not all parents have anti-school attitudes. In fact, they may even have fond memories of school, but believe the type of education they desire for their children to be unavailable to them. The participants in this study voiced a broad range of opinions about school, but their views on childhood, parenting and learning were very similar. Attitudes are strongly affect-laden and guide the process of information gathering or **surveying the landscape**.

The **surveying the landscape** stage involves both formal research and informal methods, such as hearing the views of others and acting upon their own feelings. Social media and online sources are strong influences with Facebook and forums opening up new networks of parents both locally and from further afield. The internet seemingly provides open access to a balanced range of sources, however as I explained in Chapter 6, when a parent watches a YouTube clip, another one a similar theme is suggested. Algorithms in the software provide information to the viewer that is from a narrow range of viewpoints. The search for success

stories tends to reinforce the attitudes already held by the parents, although some claim to have researched home education in an unbiased fashion.

The final stage, **negotiating obstacles**, involves finding practical solutions to barriers they may face. These include support from family members, changes to work patterns and even location. The strength of pre-existing attitudes seems to determine whether the parents overcome the obstacles faced. Again, social media and online resources have made this process faster and easier. Parents can gather recommendations about where to live and activities/groups to join, they can also peruse school websites can be perused and find people and education providers that share their views.

I illustrated the relationship between the three categories in Chapter 5. **Attitudinal direction** drives **surveying the landscape** and to a lesser degree the information gleaned during the surveying stage may influence or reinforce attitudes. **Negotiating obstacles** is facilitated by finding solutions and support during the **surveying the landscape** stage.

In addition to illuminating the stages of the decision-making journey, the findings, along with literature drawing similar conclusions and concepts from Reddy, Gee and Bourdieu were used to demonstrate properties of the grooves in the educational landscape.

In Chapter 7, I introduced William Reddy's (2001) framework for navigating feelings. In summary, Reddy's theory states that *emotional suffering* induced by restrictive *emotional regimes* leads to the development of *emotional refuges*. In this study, I proposed that parents wish to escape the 'system' in order to seek *emotional refuge* for themselves and their children. The refuges are from various aspects of control implemented in schools; from the testing and reward system to the influence of others and the chaotic school run.

Properties the refuges have in common include providing a feeling of comfort, shared ideas with other members and unwritten rules. Drawing upon Bourdieu's concepts allowed further examination of the refuges in relation to patterns from other aspects of society. The unwritten rules may be indicative of a form of *doxa* and investment in their meaning gives rise to an *illusio* within the refuges that differs from that of mainstream education (Bourdieu, 1990b). Alternatively, parents may be seeking a temporary break from the mainstream educational *illusio* for their child. The rise in parents wanting their child to 'step out of the system' may be indicative of a wider problem in society. Some parents feel that the high-stakes, competitive environment for children and teachers is causing a form of distress. They are not indifferent to the mainstream educational *illusio,* but they value a different type of outcome which means they invest and find meaning in different aspects of society to the mainstream. Most, however, would like their child to be able to access mainstream 'grooves' at some point in the future. The parents seem aware of this paradox and admit that they often use more traditional teaching materials for the core subjects of English and maths. According to Threadgold 'For Bourdieu, an *illusio* is largely taken for granted, it is *doxic* in the *fields* that we struggle in, and is rarely critically engaged' (Threadgold, 2018:169). An i*llusio* is normally an unseen, unconscious phenomenon. I would argue that the parents in this study are awakened to the fact the general population finds meaning in different sorts of things to them, they show great reflexivity and have not taken the decision lightly or because of pressure (as in the case of Morton's (2011) 'last resort' home educators).

Figures stated in Chapter 1 showed that interest in home and alternative education is rising. Growth in registered home educators in recent years has been unprecedented. It is difficult to estimate true numbers as many home educators do not register with their Local

Authority (LA). Not only are the numbers of home educators rising rapidly but the reasons for the choice appear to be changing. In his studies of Norwegian home educators, Christian Beck (2006 cited in Beck, 2010) found that the number of parents choosing it for religious reasons decreased from 30% in 2002/3 to just 7% in 2006. Social reasons were the major category in 2006 (pedagogical reasons remained the same in both sample years).

Morrisson (2014) draws parallels between military conscientious objection and home schooling as well as differences. Like home education, military conscientious objection was traditionally associated with religious reasons. More recently, atheists have been able to declare conscientious objection for social and moral reasons. The fact that home education has gone from being treated with hostility to being accepted as a viable alternative in many countries also mirrors the trajectory of military conscientious objection. Like home educators however, some may have to leave their country to avoid conscription. Of course, with the military, the decision is for oneself whereas removal from school is often without the consent of the child.

As stated in Chapter 2, home education has become normalised in the United States (Apple, 2006) and increasingly legitimised in Canada (Aurini and Davies, 2005). Policy makers and local authorities seem to be aware of the rising numbers of home educators in the UK but do not have consistent approaches to suit the needs of families. There is no blanket policy with regard to flexi-schooling for example, and access to free schools with differing ideologies depends on where the family reside. The availability of resources and support from local authorities also depends on postcode, and newly issued government guidelines still only suggest discretionary advice. Ofsted do not specifically cover the provision for home educated families, only vulnerable children with regard to safeguarding.

Government websites and local authorities are not the first place parents look for information and help. The rise in online home education sites means that previously hard to find groups are now easily accessible (Fensham-Smith, 2017). Very few of the participants in this study were utilising the groups once the **surveying the landscape** phase was complete. They found local people and meeting places so the websites themselves were not the refuge, they simply facilitated the discovery of people. For example, P12 chose to attend a gardening group and children's woods. If parents exploring alternatives to mainstream schools cannot find enough like-minded people online or locally, then the strength of attitudes determines the outcome. For example, P1 decided to set up her own provision but P18 felt she did not want to go it alone as a home educator in Northern Ireland so investigated suitable schools.

In this thesis, not only have I theorised about the journey to becoming a home educator, but I have also identified those who wish to step back into the system or **tunnel between** types of provision. Like Kraftl (2013a), I observed that home education is not a matter of binaries and many home educators are not completely against school. This is a useful finding for policymakers and education providers who should be paying attention to the reasons. The press interest in my research during the Covid-19 pandemic (I was invited to write blog posts and speak on local news) indicates there may be a further rise in numbers of home educated children as parents see the benefits and question whether school is the best place for their children.

Policymakers may be interested in the finding that often, parents are looking for settings that possess qualities other than academic success. This is particularly relevant for children who suffer from anxiety or have mild to moderate learning difficulties. The education market seems to be responding to parental demands in that there has been a rise in

outdoor and forest school activities within mainstream education; although this is sometimes tokenism or 'forest school lite' as not all of the principles are adhered to (McCree, 2019). This increase in outdoor activities on offer suggests that consumer demands can influence the services available. Forest schools have provided *emotional refuge* to children who are experiencing problems in a classroom environment as they are a place to feel free of pressure and written work. Of course, certain elements of mainstream education mentioned by participants such as large class sizes cannot be altered without a change in government funding.

If schools provided more sites of *emotional refuge* in the school day that were free from extrinsic rewards, and therefore some aspects of the mainstream *illusio*, perhaps parents would feel there is respite for their children. This could be via more natural outdoor play, mindfulness, creativity or off-site activities. Rather than withdrawing from 'the system', this could help to build resilience via decreasing anxiety, raising self-esteem and encouraging co-operation.

Contribution to knowledge

As explained in Chapter 2, there is very little research on home education in the UK that was not carried out by advocates of home education, therefore introducing an element of unintended bias. There is an even smaller body of research about the rise in alternative educational provision. In this thesis, I corroborated the findings of others about reasons for home educating and went on to define properties of the alternative spaces the parents had found/created. I integrated theories of others to help explain the process of parents and children escaping from the pressure of the mainstream educational *illusio* into *emotional*

refuges. The use of Reddy, Bourdieu and Gee provides an original conceptual framework that added depth to my metaphor of a journey along grooves in a landscape.

This study contributes to new knowledge about the factors that influence potential home educators. Some of the participants were teetering on the edge of making the decision. Lees calls this making 'leaps of faith' (2011:275). I have constructed my theory based on the concept that some parents wished to **step out of the system**. They did not blindly leap, but looked around for evidence and alternatives, and overcame barriers along the way. Some wished to **tunnel between** different types of provision such as by flexi-schooling or providing extra support for core subjects so the child would be able to transition to school at some point in the future.

The findings provide insights into the journey parents undertake as they decide how to educate their child(ren). I constructed a substantive theory applicable to many types of parent. I incorporated other types of home educator such as those using alternative providers and flexi-schooling and I have shown that often, those parents choose a blend of the mainstream and alternative. Most parents in this study aimed to re-enter the system at some point or still had 'one foot in each camp'.   This is in contrast with Lees' (2011) claim of mainstream authoritarian schooling and alternative education modalities existing in different paradigms; with one being defined only in opposition to the other.

Limitations

This was a small-scale study with five of the early participants all utilising the same alternative provider in the North West of England (and two using the adjoining nursery); this was a convenience sample. In Grounded Theory methods, theoretical sampling leads to the recruitment of participants who can further illuminate the emerging categories. Delving

into the themes identified early on was the aim and the flexibility of Grounded Theory allows the study to move in any direction deemed necessary. The second round of recruitment led to parental responses from areas such as the South of England, Yorkshire and Scotland. A disproportionate number of parents (7 out of 21) were university lecturers and teachers/ex-teachers (or teaching assistants). Reasons for this could be that this group of people feel best able to teach their own children, they may feel more willing to share their experiences as they are less likely to feel judged as being inadequate in this regard. They may also be more open to engage with researchers as they have some familiarity with the PhD process and are less suspicious of researcher intentions. An issue with this is that having been trained to teach, these parents are likely to be more successful in home educating their children than the general population. They may also have different views on schools and learning due to their career experiences and reading done whilst at university. Three of the participants were studying for master's degrees, and one of these acknowledged how hard it is to recruit for studies. The parents who spoke of their job or university education linked it to their decision-making in some way. After advertising nationwide and locally via posters and online means, twenty-one parents were recruited in total, only one of whom was male. This is a clear limitation of the study, as the majority of the data comprises the voices of women. We do not know if the fathers' points of view are being modified or misrepresented as they are from a second-hand source.

Recruiting home educating parents is notoriously difficult and I experienced similar problems to others e.g. Fensham-Smith (2017). I was being turned away by a person who was providing information and support for those considering home education at a nearby play centre. I contacted her via a mutual friend on Facebook and believed my approach to be polite and respectful but received a surprisingly harsh response. The candidates that did

willingly comply are a self-selecting sample that do not represent the home educators who wish to remain private. Two participants were initially interested and then declined. One was recommended to me by a family member at her church but did not respond to my messages. I suggest that the home educators who refuse to speak to researchers feel no affinity towards us. We are possibly seen as part of the surveillance culture and inspection regime that may become a reality if policy changes. After all a university is an extension of the school system.

Another limitation is that the study only included the voices of parents. The journey of home and alternatively educated children would be very interesting to follow. This is unlikely to be a possibility, however as the parents act as gatekeepers. Additionally, it would be difficult to discern how much influence the parent is having over the child.

It might be seen as a limitation that I did not enquire about the social demographics of the participants because I purposefully did not ask their age, qualifications, sexuality or income. The reason for this is that I felt that building a good relationship with the participants might be hindered by asking specific questions relating to their upbringing. The purpose of using Grounded Theory is that it reveals what is meaningful for the participants. Despite me asking no questions about nationality or ethnicity, some of the candidates revealed their background as it was integral to their story. One was a Somalian refugee whose family moved to Denmark when she was a child. One was Slovenian and wished to teach her son her first language so had started flexi-schooling. Two of the participants that were born abroad were critical of the education systems in those countries. One was familiar with home education as it was common in his home state of California. Another mentioned racist bullying due to her being mixed-race.

Suggestions for further research

This was a small-scale study intended to gather rich rather than broad data. The respondents resided in a variety of locations around the UK, and some were originally from other countries. Only a small number of parents were purely home educating in the traditional sense. This may be due to the reluctance of such parents to engage with research, or it could be due to the phrasing of my advertisements, in that I called for those considering home or alternative education.

A group of parents who were beyond the realms of this study are ones who have stopped home educating (although this was the case with P15 whose daughter asked to start school due to lack of girls her own age in home education groups and P8 whose daughters went to a fee-paying high school). It would be interesting to investigate reasons for discontinuing home education. Data from those families would further illuminate the **negotiating obstacles** category and may lead to insights into the **attitudinal direction** subcategories of **learning without teachers** and **opinions of school.**

This study predominantly focused on the decision-making that took place in parents when their child(ren) were under the age of seven. To develop the grounded theory further and enable it to become more generalisable, the experiences of wider populations could be sampled such as families residing in other countries. To move the theory from a substantive one about a specific process, to a more formal one applicable to other contexts, other types of parental decision-making such as parental choice of mainstream school, pre-school childcare, children's healthcare etc. could be incorporated.

For example, Neill and Coyne (2018) expanded on the substantive grounded theory about the effects of felt or enacted criticism (FEC) (Neill et al., 2013) in parental medical situations

by gathering secondary data from a diverse range of populations. This moved the grounded theory toward a generalisable, formal theory and demonstrated its applicability across social groups, age ranges and ethnicities.

Bryant (2017) asserts that one of history's most eminent theorists, Charles Darwin, used the principles of Grounded Theory in building his theory of natural selection. Accounts from Darwin's autobiography show his comprehensive search for examples to illuminate his developing theory. He reports in his autobiography that he '*without any theory collected facts on a wholesale scale,* more especially with respect to domesticated productions by printed enquiries, by conversation with skilful breeders and gardeners, and by extensive reading' (Darwinonline.org.uk:120 cited by Bryant, 2017 emphasis added by Bryant). He also made use of memorandums (memoing) and theoretical sorting. Finally, his hypothesis came at the end rather than the beginning of the study. Others could then extend or validate his theory. Upon first reading Bourdieu's Outline of a Theory of Practice (1977), I sensed that his observations in Kabylia during the Algerian war led to him using his own version of Grounded Theory as he conceptualised the actions of individuals and structures in the societies he observed. He went on to apply these terms to different *fields* using his own research and that of others and thus moved his theories from substantive to formal.

In addition to extending my grounded theory, I have identified areas that warrant further study. Rather than the parents' point of view, these topics could be researched by hearing the voices of the staff, children or even policy makers. In Chapter 1, I mentioned the Channel 4 investigative programme 'Dispatches' in which Children's Commissioner highlighted illegal and unregistered schools. The legal status of the schools is difficult to define as children may be officially attending on different days and numbers of hours so are

seen as part-time, the legalities of alternative settings were explored in Chapter 2. Ofsted have the power to close ones they prove are operating full-time but the evidence for this is not easy to obtain. One of my participants who decided not to home educate commented that she thought children in the centre she helped at could be struggling due to undiagnosed learning difficulties. This could also be an issue for fully home educating parents (P12 suspected her daughter might be dyslexic). These alternative settings, tuition and study centres may be difficult for researchers to gain access to but are an area for further research into how they operate and why parents are choosing them.

Another area highlighted by the above programme (as well in my data with the children of P21 and daughter of P3 and 4) is children refusing to go to school for mental health reasons, especially anxiety. In Rothermel's (2003) study, 24% of 412 responses about what motivated them to home educate stated that the child was sick, exhausted, depressed, stressed, or unhappy in school. Fines being issued by the Local Authority and schools worrying about their attendance data may lead to the children being formally withdrawn from the schools at which they are registered. Home is an *emotional refuge* for these children. Research into what sort of education is occurring at home and the provision if any offered to them is of urgent need. How schools handle these cases should also be researched and successful methods of re-integration fed back in recommendations to policy makers. In her thesis, Helen Lees argues that alternative education should be advertised as a viable alternative to the mainstream and that 'not doing so is causing serious and unnecessary distress to certain taxpayers who find that a schooling modality does not suit their child/children' (Lees, 2011:24).

Respite in the day does not tend to happen at all once the children move from primary to secondary school as they are given a packed timetable of academic subjects. This increase in pressure with fewer breaks may be a contributory factor in the cases of older children who are being removed from school due to mental health problems and even self-harm (see Children's commissioner report, 2019 and Nelson, 2013). More research is needed about children who refuse to attend school and end up being home educated as a result. These 'last resort' home educators (Morton, 2011) have been failed by some aspect of mainstream schooling. The time spent away from school during the Covid-19 crisis may have encouraged more parents to continue home educating their children as with P21.

A final recommendation is more research should be carried out on opportunities for incorporating *emotional refuges* into schools. The forest schooling movement could offer some ideas or schools could simply allocate more time that is free from the pressures of examinations, rewards and sanctions. Art, music and drama sessions that are not assessed for examination purposes may also benefit children. These spaces would allow a step out of mainstream educational *illusio*.

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The process of becoming a home educator PhD research study

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Ask questions if anything you read is not clear or you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not to take part.

There is very little research into home education in the UK. In fact, the number of home educating families is currently unknown but is apparently rapidly increasing. I would like to explore the decision making process and how parents go from having a 'gut feeling' to becoming a dedicated home educator.

What is the purpose of the study?

The research is primarily for my PhD thesis but will also provide data for conference presentations journal articles and possible book chapters. The information will be of interest to academic researchers from other universities and hopefully other home educating families.

Why have I been invited?

MMU has been undertaking research at ***************. Some families have been chosen due to their attendance there. Others have been contacted through home school networks or by being known by participating families.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary. If you decide to participate after reading the description of the study and asking any questions, you will be asked to sign consent forms to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

The research will last eighteen months.

Parent interviews will take place in the home or an arranged meeting place (Skype or phone if meeting is not possible). These will last around twenty minutes to an hour. I will be asking about the reasons for thinking about home education, use of technology and research in the decision to home educate. The interview questions are flexible and will change from one participant to the next. These will be recorded and transcribed. Confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured.

If, after the introductory interview you are chosen for the longer term research, three further interviews will take place at approximately 3 or 4 month intervals. (The time scale is flexible and depends on the age of your child and your schedule, there is no rush to complete the study) I may need to contact you the following year to talk about the decision you make.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?
Parents may feel stress or emotion when discussing their decision to home educate or problems they are experiencing. If this occurs then these questions can be missed out or the interview paused or stopped.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
I cannot promise that this study will help you but it may be of use to other home educating parents and information gained from the research will increase the understanding of UK home education. Reflecting on your thoughts may help in your decision making.

What if there is a problem?
If you have a complaint about the research study, your experience, and/or the researcher. Feel free to contact me (0161 217 0904 c.birkett@mmu.ac.uk) or my supervisor Professor Cathy Lewin (0161 247 5191 c.lewin@mmu.ac.uk). If you remain unhappy and wish to complain formally then the university complaints procedure may be necessary. This can be done via Professor Cathy Lewin.

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?
Your confidentiality will be safeguarded during and after the study. Interview data will be recorded and kept on a password protected laptop until it is transcribed by myself. Once I am happy that I have captured everything accurately, the recording will be deleted and pseudonyms will be used in written transcripts. The transcripts and codes identifying which participant is which will be stored on a password protected computer.

What will happen if I don't carry on with the study?
If you withdraw from the study I would like to use information gained up to that point. If you are not happy with that then the data will be destroyed and not used at all. If you change your mind and would like to stay in contact to update me with any thoughts or experiences then please feel free to email or phone me.

What will happen to the results of the research study?
The results of the study will be presented at conferences on education and childhood studies and published in journals. I will email all participants to notify them when this occurs. None of the participants will be identifiable in the articles.

Who is the study funded by?
Manchester Metropolitan University pay for the PhD fees and provide a bursary.

Thank you for considering participation in the study. Please feel free to contact me with any further questions on c.birkett@mmu.ac.uk or **********************

Carrie Birkett

Carrie Birkett
PhD
ESRI
Brooks Building
Manchester Metropolitan University

Title of Project: The process of becoming a home educator

Name of Researcher: Carrie Birkett

Participant Identification Code for this project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet
for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions
about the interview procedure.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw
at any time without giving any reason to the named researcher.

3. I understand that my responses will be audio recorded and used for analysis
for this research project.

4. I understand that my responses will remain anonymous.

5. I agree to take part in the above research project.

6. I understand that at my request a transcript of my interview can be made
available to me.

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_Carrie Birkett_____   _____   _____

Researcher   Date   Signature