

# **The End of 'Education': Learning from Home Education**

## **600 - 1000 word synopsis**

This paper will briefly outline the context of home education in the UK and US. A definition of home education will be put forward (Petrie, 1998; Petrie, Windrass and Thomas, 1999) and some legal issues will be explained (Lines, 1999; Bielick, Chandler and Broughman, 1999; Rothermel, 2002 and 2004; Gabb, 2004). Three different types of neighbourhood home education groups will be presented and their role analysed according to Wenger's Communities of Practice framework (1998). This theory will be briefly described and the attendant concepts of practice, participation and situated learning. This is helpful in understanding the role of home education neighbourhood group because it helps explain how these groups are formed and continue to adapt and change in order to meet their members' needs. The data for this paper was collected from 34 in-depth interviews with home educators from the UK and the US. (Safran, 2008)

The home education neighbourhood group is an unusual community of practice because, unlike other areas where this analysis has been applied, it is not an institution with well known structures. In the neighbourhood home education group there are no defined structures, no formal obligations, no agreed way to do things and their joint enterprise may not even be made explicit. Each group will have its own variant of the joint enterprise, way of engaging, and shared repertoire.

As home education is uniquely self-determining and open to whatever type of learning style or underlying philosophy the family chooses, the families can try a style for a while and see how it develops. They can change dramatically to a different style or use combinations of many styles. The neighbourhood home education group also needs to be able to address and reflect the families' needs with regard to learning choices. In this way it will continue to be useful to families who will maintain support of the joint enterprise by continuing to attend the group.

The advantage of the community of practice model is that it helps us to understand a movement that is diverse, grass roots and non hierarchical. It describes and explains the mechanism whereby these groups remain active and useful and explain why they do so.

The diversity of the groups is testimony to the democratic, participatory and situated nature of these communities of practice involving its members learning and constructing their practices for themselves. Although these communities of practice have variable features, they all engage in a form of collective situated learning which helps transform the practitioners (Safran, 2008).

While reference is made to learning there is no mention of education. Learning is taken here to be integral and continuous aspect of human life; 'education' has become a constructed specialised activity which can be given and taken away. It functions as an economic category when it is given a 'value' and 'sold' to the individual in the form of an 'expert', or a paid professional that the individual thinks necessary in order to learn. Home educating families are doing for themselves something normally attributed to mechanisms that are delivered by professionals who conform to state regulations and whose values and principles reflect the prevalent ideologies.

The experience of home education neighbourhood groups can be extrapolated further to show that institutions are not needed to direct people's activities and learning. Situated learning, learning through one's life experiences, has long been recognised (Mitra et al, 2005, EU Directive, 2007 ). Exercising self-determination through learning in a socially situated practice can be a life enhancing and transforming enterprise. Where 'education' reflects the principles of competition and accumulation, 'learning' reflects the principles of self determination and co-operation mirroring the society we want to move toward. This process needs to be actively re-discovered and promoted so that all people, not just home educators, can take advantage of the potential benefits of continued, explicit life learning.

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