Chapter 7

Techno Teacher Moms: Web 2.0 Connecting Mothers in the Home Education Community

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ABSTRACT

Home education is on the rise in Australia. However, unlike parents who choose mainstream schooling, these parents often lack the support of a wider community to help them on their educational and parenting journey. This support is especially lacking as many people in the wider community find the choice to home education confronting. As such, these parents may feel isolated and alienated in the general population as their choice to home educate is questioned at best, and ridiculed at worst. These parents often find sanctuary online in homeschool groups on Facebook. This chapter explores the ways that Facebook Groups are used by marginalized and disenfranchised families who home educate to meet with others who are likeminded and aligned with their beliefs and philosophies. It is through these groups that parents, in relation to schooling it is especially mothers, are able to ask for advice, to vent, to explore options and find connections that may be lacking in the wider community.

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INTRODUCTION

Home education is on the rise in Australia (English, 2013, 2015a; 2015b). However, unlike parents who choose mainstream schooling, these parents often lack the support of a wider community to help them on their educational and parenting journey. This support is especially lacking as many people in the wider community find the choice to home education confronting. As such, these parents may feel isolated and alienated in the general population as their choice to home educate is questioned at best, and ridiculed at worst. These parents often find sanctuary online in homeschool groups on Facebook (English, 2015b).

This chapter explores the ways that Facebook Groups are used by marginalized and disenfranchised families who home educate to meet with others who are likeminded and aligned with their beliefs and philosophies. The chapter explores five groups: two Australia wide groups, two regional groups and one local group. It is through these groups that mothers, whose work it is to support their children’s education (Lareau, 1989), to vent, to explore options and find connections that may be lacking in the wider community. As education is generally seen as the work of women (cf. Griffith & Smith, 2005), this chapter will explore how Facebook groups provide a sanctuary for mothers who may be struggling to find support within their local community, the IRL (In Real Life) world if you will. It will discuss the various groups dedicated to home education in Australia housed on Facebook, their settings, their outlines and their policies on joining. The settings suggest their ‘visibility’ to the wider world, their outlines describe their philosophy, their expectations of behavior and the beliefs that are allowed and their policies on joining define, for the group at least, who counts as a home education family and who is excluded.

Before starting to explore this issue, I believe it is important to examine what I mean by home education. In this chapter, home-education has been defined, in line with Harding and Farrell (2003, p. 125) as “the education of children within the home setting … overseen by parents or other adults, significant to the child and family.” When talking about home education, I am referring to a suite of practices that are neither homogenous nor easy to label. There are myriad reasons for, and ways to, home educate. However, there is fluidity between these groups as families may move between them. In addition, home education is rarely an all or nothing decision, with many families moving between home education and school education, or the reverse. Further, many families may choose an arrangement with schools where their children are enrolled part time and home educated part time.

In one study in Norway, Beck (2012) found that there were four groups of home educators. Using the work of Bernstein (1990), particularly on orientation, he identified these groups as, firstly, the structured home educators. Structured home educators were middle class, religious, well-educated conservatives. The second group were unschoolers who were “well educated middle class parents, anti-establishment, with radical political and cultural views” (Beck, 2012, p. 74). The third group were pragmatic and were usually rural, working class families for whom the home education environment and the family’s work environment were linked. Finally, the unknown group was all those who were not registered and thus not accessible to study.

In my research, I have found that there are three general categories of home educators in Australia. The first category of home education family is the traditional school at home family. This family is generally considered to follow a school at home model and replicate the traditional schooling arrangements in the