* 1. ***Change over time.*** Rothermel (2002) found one of the most noticeable characteristics of home education was that of ‘change over time’. Not only did parents adapt and alter their approach to how they educated their children over time but the parents’ motives at the outset were soon superseded by other, different motives as they became more immersed in the culture of home education.
  2. ***Types of home educators.*** The stereotypes of home educators are that either they are hippy rebels or hothousing fanatics[[1]](#endnote-1). Typically, they are referred to as if they were a ‘type’ of parent. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth as Rothermel (2005) discusses at length. Home educators tend to have little if anything in common with each other beyond their decision to home educate and a desire to take full responsibility for their children. (this can also be described as a wish to take control). The willingness to join forces to take advantage of educational rates on activities is a feature peculiar to home education. Home education is not a homogenous activity but is undertaken in very differently ways by very different people, even within groups (i.e religious groups).
  3. ***Time spent on home educating.*** Rothermel (2002) found that 62% of families tended to enjoy a mix of academic and informal education on a daily basis, with some families keeping to this more strictly than others. Rothermel found that children were assisted in their learning by their parents facilitating resources, interests and visits, by following and sharing interests, and through discussion by listening and making time to answer their children's questions. This style of education involves the full time attention of at least one parent, although that time may be shared between two parents, perhaps working part time.
  4. Professor Desforges[[2]](#endnote-2) reports that "Our findings show that it is the (parental) involvement of learning activities in the home that is most closely associated with better cognitive attainment in the early years". Given that the recent ONS data[[3]](#endnote-3) on the amount of time that parents spent in child care each day is an average of just 32 minutes a day, it can be anticipated that home educated children, whose parents typically are involved in their learning activities for many hours each day, can be expected to demonstrate good cognitive attainment.
  5. Home education with its individually paced, child-centred approach to learning appears to provide the necessary time for children to absorb, assimilate and understand challenging problems. In school, such cognitive challenges have been found to take up just 1 per cent of lesson time[[4]](#endnote-4) in contrast with home education where cognitive challenges typically are a characteristic feature. Professor Karmilloff Smith[[5]](#endnote-5) has generated ideas about 'incubation' periods whereby children take time to absorb and unravel problems presented to them.
  6. ***The pressures on parents who choose to educate their children at home.***My research shows that the most common pressures cited by families who home educate are: other people's opinions, not being accepted in their community and the ensuing isolation that this brings; parents not having enough time for themselves; financial worries; the exhausting and time consuming nature of home education; and the potential is a lack of resources. Some parents also say they feel pressured by the responsibility of home educating. Beyond this, I have identified other pressures as follows: pressure to perform; having children who are late readers; family and friend pressures; and children informally labelled as hyperactive by others. Despite the pressures linked to home education, research suggests that home educated children grow into capable adults and that many of them chose to home educate their own children[[6]](#endnote-6).
  7. ***Other people's opinions and ensuing sense of isolation.*** The sense of isolation and lack of acceptance in the local community can cause children to suffer, making them feel awkward and shy. It is not uncommon to hear home educated children complain about they way the feel they are being interrogated by strangers on the street during school hours. Some of this may be well-meaning interest, but too often it causes distress to children and increases their sense of being different. Sometimes members of the public assume the children have special needs and questions about reading and writing are common.
  8. ***Lack of money.*** Many parents find it difficult to cope without time for themselves and where money is tight, this can certainly place a strain on relationships within the family, who after all, are in much closer contact that would be the case in a family with school children.
  9. ***Lack of time for parents alone.*** As regards the lack of time for themselves, parents often overcome this by negotiating their time with their child to allow for some time alone. However, this does remain an issue. In my experience parents who continue to home educate come to accept this as an inevitable aspect of home education.
  10. ***Financial worries.*** When home educating financial pressures tend to either remain, or be absorbed, into the 'culture' of the family. Generally speaking, home educating families live on one income and tend to be less well off than their school educating peers. Research shows, however, that parental income is not a predictor of poor attainment[[7]](#endnote-7).
  11. ***The exhausting and time consuming nature of home education***. Research from Australia[[8]](#endnote-8) has identified maternal overload as a problem because of the commitment and responsibility of home education which so often falls mainly to the mothers. However, in my research both mothers and fathers expressed concerns over this issue. This pressure can be reduced when families get together and share some of the associated responsibilities. Some local groups meet up weekly and parents can relax in a group care situation.
  12. ***Lack of resources.*** Concerns over resources are overcome as families share resources, ideas, discount cards etc. The increasing use of email discussion groups by home educators had led to a further sharing of resources.
  13. ***Pressure to perform.*** Home educators known to their LAs often feel under pressure to demonstrate that their children are achieving to the standard that they would if they were at school. LAs do sometimes put particular pressure on parents who feel less sure in their decision and this ultimately leads to some parents ceasing to home educate.
  14. ***Having children who are late readers.*** Home educated children may appear to make slower progress with their reading and writing than school children. This tends to be because their parents prefer to let them learn at their own pace. This attitude is sometimes, but should not be, confused with schools' poor readers, whereby the children may be experiencing real problems with their reading. Many home educators adopt this slower pace approach to reading and writing[[9]](#endnote-9) and there is no research that I am aware of indicating that this method leads to later problems. Research shows that late readers soon catch up with their earlier reading peers, often becoming keen readers[[10]](#endnote-10). Nevertheless, for some parents, having a child aged 6-10 years who cannot read, can and does lead to criticism of their decision to home educate and to labels of dyslexia. The research[[11]](#endnote-11) shows that these late readers tend to become competent and avid readers.
  15. ***Family and friend pressures.*** Rothermel (2002) showed that friends and families, particularly in the early days, can put home educating parents under considerable pressure. As new home educators build friendships within the home educating community the force of this pressure diminishes, but initially it can cause a great deal of distress and some families decide not to continue with their home education.
  16. Through my research, I have interviewed families where there is disagreement over home education between spouses. Generally, this is where the mother wants to home educate and the father does not.
  17. ***Moving from home to school education***. Whilst my research indicates that home educated children who decide to give school at try usually manage the transition very well, it is the case that a change from home education to school education brings not only a change in educational format but encompasses a change of lifestyle and friendships for both home educated children and their parents.
  18. ***How long does home education last?*** Families who home educate from birth to 16-18 years of age are in the minority and tend to be those with larger families. Within home educating families, children who, over the compulsory education years, experience a school and home education mix, are likely to be in the majority (this would need retrospective research to fully establish this).
  19. Rothermel (2002) found that from the 419 home educating families whose questionnaire responses were analysed, 20% of families had at least one child in school and 47% of families had home educated children who had previously been in school.
  20. Also in that research, a third of the home educating parents said there were no plans for their home-educated children to attend school in the future, as opposed to 14% who said they would. A further half were open minded, many indicating that it would be the children's decision.
  21. Where parents said that their children might later be in school, respondents said this was either, because it would be what the children wanted, or for easier access to exams, university and extra resources; other parents explained that it might be 'best at the time' or because home education became ‘too much of a struggle’, parents might both need to work full-time or because it was 'God's will'.
  22. Home education can be suitable for some children, some of the time, and families are likely to follow their children's needs rather than steadfastly insist on home educating regardless.
  23. Research[[12]](#endnote-12) looking specifically at children's transition from home to school and from school to home education has found that children moving from home education into school tend to adjust well where teachers are "helpful, professional and considerate[[13]](#endnote-13)". Children whose parents decide to send them to school usually believe that it is in the child's best interests, although these interests vary from child to child[[14]](#endnote-14).
  24. ***Formal Qualifications.*** Children who are home educated are able to take the same formal educational qualifications as school children. However, in practice this often requires strenuous efforts on the part of the parents in negotiating the minefield of taking exams outside school.
  25. ***Do home-educated children get jobs?*** We do not know in the UK how home educated children perform in the labour market.

1. Hothousing is a term used describing an intensive education leading to early achievement. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Desforges and Abourchaar (2001) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=7&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=374 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. In her analysis of over 1,000 lessons, Professor Diane Montgomery of Middlesex University found that 70 per cent of periods where pupils and teachers were interacting was taken up by the teacher talking, while only 1 per cent involved cognitive challenges where pupils worked things out for themselves rather than being fed facts. She believes that this is partly the fault of an overloaded curriculum which leaves little time for creative thought (Dodd 1998). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Karmiloff Smith (1992) [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ray (2003) , Knowles and Muchmore (1995). Knowles (1991) [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Desforges and Abourchaar (2001) and Rothermel (2004a,b) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Trevaskis (2006) The Danger of Maternal Overload and Maternal Distress. Available on line at http://www.home-ed.vic.edu.au/category/parents-stories/. Trevaskis has undertaken research with home educated children with learning difficulties. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. As Thomas (1998) has found, [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Thomas (1998) [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Thomas (1998) [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Jackson (2006) [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Jackson (2006) - citing her own work and that of Snyder (2005) and Stoppler, (1998) [↑](#endnote-ref-14)