

A Suitable Education?

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Abstract *UK law requires that all children must undergo a period of “suitable education,” provided by a school “or otherwise.” This compulsion is resourced by an increasingly complex education system of institutions. A small group of parents, however, explore and utilise educational spaces beyond, and distinct from the school to educate their children. Despite its size this group has become a matter of considerable political interest, focused on the limitations of state agents to act to ensure that a suitable education is being provided. A particular complication in this debate is the lack of a consensus on what a suitable education would look like. In this paper, I focus on framing a defensible account of a suitable education. I want to make two sets of claims. The first is that the UK State has three distinct tasks in relation to the education of children, each task places a different requirement on the action of the State and makes a different contribution to any definition of a suitable education. The second is that there is a robust theoretical debate concerning what “education” looks like. I argue that whilst this does not allow us to specify a suitable education in detail, nevertheless we can be more specific than case law presently expresses.*

Keywords Elective home education, suitable education, liberal education, schooling, democratic state

Introduction

UK law requires that all children undergo a period of “suitable education.” At present this is from the ages of approximately five to 16. This education may be provided by a school or otherwise:

The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time 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. (Education Act, 1996: section 7)

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This compulsion is resourced by an increasingly complex education system of institutions wedded to a particular set of curricula objectives, ways of doing things and expectations of role holders, e.g., teachers and pupils. There are, however, a small group of parents who explore and utilise educational spaces beyond, and distinct from the school to educate their children (see for example, Thomas and Pattison, 2007; Kraftl, 2014). Although there is a relatively small group who undertake elective home education (EHE¹), they have become a matter of considerable political interest, including being the focus of the Badman Report (2009), House of Commons Education Committee (2012), and Welsh Assembly Government consultation (2012). In part, the expressed concern of state officials has been about child safety, though the evidence is clearly against any claim that home or alternative forms of education increases the risk (see Lees, 2014, for a consideration of this point). In part, it is an aspect of the ongoing negotiation of the interface between private freedoms and state regulation (alongside tobacco use, plastic bag distribution, etc.). The concerns have been focused on the limitations of State agents, namely the local authority, to ensure that a suitable education is being provided. Whilst the UK State does have considerable powers under child protection, it is limited in terms of education and has no statutory duties to routinely monitor provision. The guidelines for local authorities say: “...under Section 437(1) of the Education Act 1996, local authorities shall intervene **if it appears** that parents are not providing a suitable education” (DCFS, 2007§2.7, original emphasis). The issue I am dealing with is not legality per se, *but* the lack of clarity of the central term “suitable education” (see Monk, 2009, for a review of the legal position).

Further, parents are not required to register their intention to home educate, provide evidence of the education taking place (unless the local authority act on Section 437), nor allow the local authority access to their property. It is, of course, difficult to know the *appearance* of the education without direct access, and some form of inspection regime, but it is complicated by the lack of a consensus on what a suitable education would look like. The focus of this paper is not, therefore, on the legal rights and responsibilities of parents and the local authority, but on the difficulty of establishing what might constitute a suitable education.

The Badman Report (2009) sums up the difficulty thus: “The terms ‘efficient’ and ‘suitable’ education are not defined in law, despite the detailed prescription of expectations in schools” (Section 3.5).

The Report follows this by quoting Case Law: “Case law has broadly described an ‘efficient’ education as one that ‘achieves that which it sets out to achieve.’ A ‘suitable’ education is one that: ‘primarily equips a child for life within the community of which he is a member, rather than the way of life in the country as a

¹ Although there are differences, I include related terms such as homeschooling or unschooling.

whole, as long as it does not foreclose the child's options in later years to adopt some other form of life if he wishes to do so" (Badman, 2009:§3.5). The case law itself being set out in: Mr Justice Woolf in the case of *R v Secretary of State for Education and Science, ex parte Talmud Torah Machzikei Hadass School Trust* (12 April 1985).

The primary difficulty with case law is that it does not seem to provide much of a resource for identifying a suitable education. In many respects it is less helpful than the resource of Article 26 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations, 1989), which Badman quotes favourably. Case law defends the rights of parents to provide a narrow and limited education so long as the child is able to take their place as a full member of their community (again narrowly conceived) with the only proviso that they must also be *able* to adopt another form of life later. (This proviso reflects what Hare (1979) saw as open-mindedness and has been the subject of some debate (see Gardner, 1993; McLaughlin, 1990; McLaughlin and Hare, 1998). This would seem to be an overly conservative account of a suitable education and places too much value on the opinion of parents over a careful consideration of the issues (see Webb, 2011).

In this paper I develop an argument towards a framework for assessing the suitability of a particular instance of compulsory education which is more helpful than present case law. The argument proceeds in two stages. First, I consider the role of the State in relation to compulsory education. I identify two specific responsibilities the State has to: (a) to ensure that children are prepared to be members of a liberal democracy and (b) to ensure that the State's commitments under international human rights agreements are fulfilled. These two aspects, however, do not deal with the broader requirement placed on parents to support the upbringing of their children. The third role of the State is to support those parents who wish to discharge these responsibilities collectively through the school. Whilst elective home educators explicitly do not involve themselves in this collective endeavour, nevertheless the public and scholarly debates around the purpose and nature of the school do illuminate what might be considered to be a suitable education. In the second stage of my argument I review this public, scholarly debate in the UK, albeit briefly, to develop a framework for educational practices both within and beyond the school.

In conclusion, I argue that a suitable education must be justified in relation to a framework with three distinct needs of children: their development as members of a liberal democratic state, their rights under international conventions, and a broad educative experience to support their upbringing. This latter point being somewhat more complex than the phrasing might suggest.

Stage 1: The (Multiple) Roles of the State

A monolithic state schooling system, both through the direct provision of schools

and the monitoring and inspection of semi-autonomous schools (Academies, Free Schools, Private schools, etc), hides a more nuanced account of the responsibilities of government in regard to the education of children. I have argued (Davies, 2013) that education is justified in so far as it supports the upbringing of children, that is, equipping them for their present and future lives, without spelling out what such an upbringing might look like². The central focus of schools is to provide an education, and in this regard they are justified in this role in so far as they support the upbringing of their pupils. Schools do, of course, facilitate other activities such as inoculation programmes, community development and organising. My concern in this paper is not with these non-educational functions.

Discussions of the role of the school in a democratic state have largely concerned themselves with ethical and political issues (see for example, Brighouse, 1995; White, 2006; Alexander, 2007), rather than segmenting ways in which these various justifications of state activity intersect in the context of a universal system of state sponsored schooling. The question of a suitable education requires a deconstruction of the three dominant justifications for state involvement in the upbringing of children within its borders.

The First Role of the State

One of the common difficulties with home education for liberal educators is the perceived lack of access to a “civic education,” by this I mean that children require some instruction in the political virtues and are enabled to live within an autonomy seeking, liberal society. Some commentators, for example, Reich (2002; 2007) see this as a right of the child, and others, for example White (1990), see it as a right of the State to ensure that the child develops these attributes. Whilst not wanting to minimise the difference between the two, nevertheless practically, both agree that it is necessary that the State ensure that: (i) general positive dispositions towards liberal democracy are fostered in the child, and (ii) the child develops the capacity for life in an autonomy-seeking society, especially the formation of rational desires and beliefs. Whilst for Reich this necessarily commits the State to some minimal conception of the good life, White sees his position as more neutral. Both, however, hold that this education supporting the development of political virtues and the ability to live in an autonomy-seeking society is compatible with the holding of strong religious or philosophical views.

The Second Role of the State

Second, the UK is a signatory of both the UN Convention on Human Rights (UNCHR) (United Nations,1948) and the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989). Both

² This is also the core of case law’s focus on education’s role to “equip a child for life within the community of which he is a member” Badman, 2009§3.5, and also the UNCRC (Art. 26).

Conventions place responsibilities on the State to ensure a minimal educational experience. The UNCHR stresses that such education should be free, that elementary education be compulsory, promote the activities of the UN and that parents have “a prior right to choose the kind of education” (United Nations, 1948: Article, 26). Article 26 is light on the actual content of the education a child should receive, and this is spelt out in more detail in Article 29:1 of the UNCRC:

State Parties agree that education of the child shall be directed to; (a) The development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential; (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations; (c) The development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate and for civilizations different from his or her own; (d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all people, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin; (e) The development of respect for the natural environment. (United Nations, 1989)

The State has, in principle, a legal obligation to ensure such a provision, though it is clear that such a broad framework does not direct the actual provision in any substantive way. Whilst few would doubt the ethical imperative of developing the child “to their fullest potential” in rhetorical terms, it is less than clear what this means and especially so when there are financial constraints on what a child can receive. It is, of course, the fact that such frameworks and their practical implications are loosely coupled that makes them suitable for international policy, and yet *unsuitable* for educational practice. Nevertheless, the UNCRC provides a minimal account of what the State ought to ensure is received, at the elementary level, by all children.

The Third Role of the State

Third, and rather differently, is the rationale for the development of a universal schooling system. The first two points above have dealt with what the State ought to ensure occurs. The first because it is necessary to sustain liberal democracy, and the second because of political commitments the State has made, on behalf of citizens, to the international community. The first remains a necessity as long as we seek to sustain a liberal democracy, and the second so long as citizens support such political commitments (it being possible that we elect an executive seeking to withdraw from

such commitments). So they remain contingent, though long term, obligations on the State. Neither of these commitments requires the development of such an elaborate system of state sponsored schooling. The third rationale is grounded in parental responsibility and especially their responsibility for supporting the upbringing of their children. This is not the place for a detailed review of parental rights and responsibilities (see Ramaekers & Suissa, 2012), but simply to note both the UNCHR and social norms assume the prior right of parents to identify their children's educational needs, but do not give them an exclusive rights over their children. The assumption is that parental obligation and rights over the upbringing of their children are prior to the State's obligations and rights to administer compulsory schooling. The State is not enforcing either its own rights or the rights of the child (as above), but managing the collective fulfilment by parents of their responsibilities. As in other areas of life, parents band together in order to satisfy desires, and fulfil obligations, as a collective; we can think of other examples such as public health and sanitation, or defence. The third justification for State involvement in schools results from the need to manage this collective endeavour in such a way that all parents can fulfil their obligations to their children, and to ensure that conflicts between parents over the content and form of that education is conducted reasonably. In effect, this has tended to mean a mixture of local and central democratic controls (e.g. elections) and Home-School liaison policies. Increasingly, however, in England we are seeing the rise of the use of market-like instruments to manage this relationship (e.g. Free Schools, academisation). This third role of the State is distinct from the previous two having no *necessary* content, except that it supports the collective upbringing of particular children. By this I mean that, whilst, in the UK, the national curriculum lays down core content for many schools, often followed by those schools free to choose otherwise, this content is *not educationally or politically necessary* (although legally binding on many schools).

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The first two roles of the State therefore provide the structure for two elements for a suitable education for both schools and home educators in the UK. The precise practical implications remain unclear; as a brief glance at the ways schools respond to the demands of the UNCRC or living in a liberal democracy shows. It is also worth noting that many state managed schools tend to take a particular approach to civics and the demands of liberal democracy. For example, they tend to be generally supportive of policing, or the market. Liberal democracy, however, offers a number of legitimate roles, including sites of resistance, which whilst marginalised in schools, may be expressed in home education.

The third role, of managing parental demands in the co-operative provision of an education suitable for upbringing, places demands which are in one sense relatively easy and in another more difficult. In the first sense, EHE practitioners have

specifically removed themselves from such a state-managed, co-operative community endeavour. Rather, they have intentionally undertaken to manage their children's upbringing themselves, and to manage relations with other community members with whom they co-operate. Thus, the State has no role here. In another sense, although the State is not involved as a "stakeholder," nevertheless its approach to schooling encapsulates an historically extended, public and scholarly debate about what constitutes a suitable education. This reflects not only the outcome of democratic processes, but the outcome of democratic debate reflected upon and churned over by scholars as well as policymakers and the general public. In the following section I want to explore the idea of a suitable education through elements of this public, scholarly debate.

Stage 2: Towards a Public and Scholarly Account of a "Suitable Education"

As Winch (1996) points out, education is a contested term. In part this is because of the difficulties in gathering together the various human activities that fall under its common sense usage and in part the ethical nature of its practice. At the very minimum education requires an individual to have learnt to do or be something that they were hitherto unable to do or to be. This is not, however, enough. In *Oliver Twist* (Dickens, 1838), Oliver is taught to pick pockets, but we would struggle to see this as "education," rather "training." We would naturally say that Oliver was *trained* to pick pockets. We might though say that he received an "education on the streets" and certainly this applies to the Artful Dodger. Education seems to require a certain type of method or approach, one which is amenable to acquiring a complex set of abilities. So we might say that someone has an education in mathematics or opera, but not shoe polishing or adding up. This is perhaps best captured in the phrase "having had an education" which gathers together the various discrete areas of learning one has achieved.

Frankena (1973) defined education in the following general terms: "*x educates y only if x fosters dispositions w in y by method z.*" Let us assume that we are considering only human persons *x* and *y*. Following Frankena, we are concerned then with two critical issues: the kinds of dispositions that ought to be fostered and the methods that are (a) legitimate and (b) effective. Neither question seems amenable to conclusive settlement nor is this my task here. Rather I am concerned to give a framework within which a particular example of education can be deemed suitable or not. Let us first consider the dispositions that need to be fostered.

Three Ways of Characterizing the Dispositions to be Fostered

When discussing education we do not do so in terms of specific dispositions, but in collective accounts of the nature of these dispositions that need to be fostered. In the literature these seem to fall into three different groups. The first articulates education through the acquisition of attributes of the self. We use the term "being an

educated person,” by which we mean that an individual has acquired a range of attributes of the self, usually but not exclusively, of the mind. Thus, we have curricula framed by “forms of knowledge” (Hirst, 1974, especially p.65ff) and perhaps more rarely “realms of meaning” (Phenix, 1964). The aspiration of this educational process is that the individual becomes a person of a certain sort, expressive of a certain *telos*. In fact “the educated person” becomes the only form of *telos* in liberal education, as it stands for the one able to make autonomous choices for themselves (though as Hirst, 1999, points out this view needs significant modification).

The second approach argues that education does not have meaning and value unless it develops the individual’s agency in some way (see Davies, 2003; 2013). The attributes of the agent are enhanced such that they are able to act in better ways. The word “better” here has two dimensions. Firstly, the educated agent behaves in ethically better ways, so we might talk of a “clever criminal,” but not an “educated criminal.” The “education” of the Artful Dodger is in survival not pick-pocketing, and Bill Sykes has no education at all. Secondly, the educated agent is able to act well and pursue the projects that matter to them, and the major project is living life well. Although the actions of the agent are related to “the attributes of the self,” nevertheless the development of the self is neither enough nor the goal of education. Thus, the attributes of the self to be developed are not concerned with the qualities of the educated person, but with their instrumental value in supporting “better action.”

The third approach holds that the particular dispositions to be fostered remains radically open (see Biesta, 2005). The accounts above assume some universal account of rationality. For Biesta this offers an a-historic and unsustainable perspective. Education is a form of coming to understand oneself and one’s agency in a particular context. Thus, there are no specific groups of dispositions to be fostered that can be prescribed in advance, only a context within which the individual becomes who they want to be. There are, of course, other, modern and post-modern, versions of a similar thesis, often reflected in child-centred approaches (see also Rousseau, 1762). For simplicity I will refer to this as the search for “*self-actualisation*,”³ which unfurls as the child works through what this might mean.

Thus, the first of my questions above, “what dispositions ought to be fostered” resolves into at least three different approaches. The education may be suitable for fostering certain attributes of the self considered as necessary for the educated person. Usually this culminates in the educated person having a broad understanding of the world and human endeavours within it. This does not identify

³ Given the various accounts cross the modern and post-modern conceptualisations of this radical open approach to education; the term “self-actualisation” is intended to reflect this variety.

with any precision the nature of this approach, as “forms of knowledge” and “realms of meaning” both satisfy this description but give different accounts of what is to be fostered. Alternatively, education might be thought to foster attributes of the agent which enable them to act well within the world. Again, what is demanded of acting well is left unspecified by such an account. Finally, we might reasonably hold that the search for dispositions to be fostered is wrong headed. The purpose is not to foster particular dispositions, but provide a context within which dispositions appropriate to the individual can be fostered.

The Characteristics of an Educational Method

The second question requires thought on what methods are distinctively educational. To anyone versed in the history of education it is clear that there are a plethora of approaches to learning from direct face to face engagement between individuals to technology mediated approaches, peer education, group learning and individual tuition. The task here is not to give a coherent account of the landscape and provide a taxonomy of such methods, rather I am concerned with identifying the central characteristics of a method that makes it “educational.” As a way into this problem we can distinguish “education” from two other forms of learning which are usually identified as “not education,” these are “indoctrination” and “training.” This is not to claim that indoctrination or training cannot be part of an educational programme, that is they may be educational, but that they are not, in themselves, education.

Indoctrinatory methods⁴ are normally intended to dissuade or disable the learner from critiquing what has been learnt. As Tan (2004, p. 264) argues: “...it is appropriate to see indoctrination as a paralysis of one’s mind, both in form and substance.” She quotes Neiman:

What allows, in part, for rationality concerning these games is not the absence of doctrines or authority, but, rather, the ability to imagine alternatives and the willingness to consider their point and worth. Any educational system that intends to prohibit this sort of imaginative enterprise, or inherently results in severely diminished capacities for such imagination, indoctrinates (quoted in Tan, 2004, p. 264)

⁴ There are a number of ways forward on the point of indoctrination. The European Court of Human Rights has ruled (Kjeldson, Busk Madsen and Pedersen v. Denmark (1976) *Application: 5095/71; 5920/72; 5926/72*, 1976) that education is not indoctrinatory if it gives out information at a general moral level, which is justified in terms of the good of the individual and does not restrict ability of others to give alternative information. The difficulty with this legal position, is that it is concerned primarily with specific content, rather than the effects on the child’s mind and their openness to educative acts in the future. Here, I deal with this second more general educational issue.

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Thus the learner is unable to draw their own conclusions, or imagine different accounts of what is (or could be) not because of mental defect but because of the learning process. Indoctrination's force is not the holding of irrational or unproven ideas (the content), but a form of learning that numbs the mind. Related to this, and worthy of comment at this point, is Dewey's (1938) account of "*miseducation*." Miseducation results in the individual no longer being open to future educational experiences. Just as indoctrination numbs the mind from rational critique of that which is taught, miseducation numbs the mind from engagement in education in the future.

The second concept, "training," is distinguished from education on two related grounds: (a) the narrowness of its focus, and (b) is concern with *only* doing rather than understanding what one is doing. Summarising the prevailing view in the UK, Winch notes: "Training...is seen as preparation to confidently perform a relatively narrow range of tasks not requiring much theoretical or underpinning knowledge." (Winch, 2012, p. 604).

Perry (1972), drawing on Peters, does attend to the use of the word, as in "trained philosopher" or "trained teacher." This is an interesting use, but I, following Perry, think this marks the difference between those who can and do philosophise or teach and those who have undertaken an accredited programme of study in these areas. A trained philosopher is therefore someone who has undertaken some formal study in philosophy. What such individuals have at their disposal is a greater range of techniques in their field of practice, and hence the link to training, but without the assumptions that the practice can be accomplished by the simple application of such techniques.

What this discussion of indoctrination and training is intended to illuminate is the kinds of methods *unsuitable* for the task of education. Spelt out in general they are:

- promotion of numbness to critical thought
- promotion of a numbness to future educational experiences
- a exclusive focus on the development of manual task competence
- a lack of concern with theoretical/underpinning knowledge

At the very least methods *suitable* for education must explicitly avoid these dangers, more proactively we might postulate an ideal set of methods which not only avoid these dangers, but also promote their opposites: critical thought, openness to future educational experiences, broad accounts of what is to be developed, and a concern with theoretical/underpinning knowledge.

Implications for practitioners

The task here is not to establish unanimity on the purpose and methods appropriate for a "suitable education," but to lay out something of the conceptual space within

which the judgement needs to be made. Frankena's definition focuses on the dispositions that need to be fostered (w), where the concept "dispositions" is to be interpreted widely. In response, I have offered three broad classes of education which identify different accounts of dispositions: the development of understanding of human experience, the development of human agency and the development of a context for self-actualisation. Educational methods are, I claim, to be distinguished from indoctrination and training. This focuses attention on methods that support a broad, critical and self-critical understanding of theoretical/underlying knowledge which maintains the individual's openness to future educational experiences. It ought to go without saying that a suitable education is one in which the methods used are reflective of the dispositions that are to be developed. It is therefore not surprising, for example, that the methods applied to an education aimed at self-actualisation are significantly different from one aimed at induction into "forms of knowledge." Educationally suitable methods share characteristics in common rather than forming a single class of objects.

Illustrating a Suitable Education?

I began this paper with a brief review of the legal position in case law and the difficulty, in relation to EHE, of establishing what counts as a suitable education. Case law, whilst offering some minimal direction, does not seem to provide as much direction as the UNCRC Article 29, and certainly does not engage with historic debates on education. Given that it needs *to appear* to a local authority that a child is not receiving a suitable education before they can act, and the resulting call from education officials to be given more powers much to the chagrin of EHE practitioners, there is a case for more detailed clarification. What I argued above is that the education of children needs to be located within the context of their upbringing. By this I mean that education of the children must support their development from neonates to interdependent adults equipping them for their lives. The precise role for education and for its sub-components, schooling or EHE, needs to be spelt out and that is the task that I have undertaken. I have developed the argument in two sections, the first dealing with the three responsibilities of the State, and the second the historical public, scholarly debate about education. What emerges is a framework of possibilities rather than a clear definition. Nevertheless, it is a space of "suitability," and allows for reasoned debate as to whether specific educational arrangements satisfy the criterion.

In this final section, I want to develop a practically oriented account of the more formal outline above. In doing so I mark a distinction between the certainty of the former and the latter's role as an *illustration* which reflects a tradition of education in the UK. The former has three strands which I want to claim must be evident in any account of a suitable education:

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1. The development of those abilities and dispositions necessary to live well within, and sustain, a liberal democracy.
2. The development of those abilities and dispositions deemed to be “the right of the child.”
3. To support the upbringing of the child by the development of suitable dispositions, w, by suitable methods, z.

White (1990) makes a strong argument for the development of rationality in the formation of both desires and beliefs, as a necessary requirement for living in a liberal democracy (I have previously largely agreed with this account, see Davies, 2003). Broadly, we might see the argument as having two elements. Firstly, citizens in a liberal democracy are required to make numerous decisions about what they ought to do, including major decisions about what kind of life they want to lead and socially critical decisions such as who to vote for. There is no way out of such decisions, liberal democracies are autonomy supporting and even the adoption of a life which eschews autonomy (e.g. as a monk) requires autonomous choices. Secondly, there are better and worse ways of making decisions. Rational thought is necessary (but not sufficient) to make better choices. White has a particular account of what will be rational, but I think we can extend the account, in a more general way, namely without specifying what, in detail, we mean by “rational.” Such an extension deals, I think, with some of Alexander’s (2007) criticism of such liberal approaches, and harmonises practically with Reich. In general we might look, in a suitable education for such indicators as the development of “thinking things through,” developing arguments, weighing up consequences, understand the way others in the child’s tradition have thought about things in the past, etc. We might also look for a certain amount of “open-mindedness” to alternatives (see Hare, 1979), and for ways in which the child is enabled to manage their desires, for example, considering delayed over instant gratification. Where there was no obvious signs of education towards the development of rational desires and decision making, then we would question the suitability of the education provided. What is not implied by White’s argument is that the child needs to be inculcated into dispositions that support a particular account of liberal democracy or in fact associated institutions (for example, market capitalism).

As I discussed earlier the UNCRC sets out a broad set of areas of learning to which every child, within states that are signatories to the convention, ought to be introduced at the elementary level. Note that in states where schooling is compulsory beyond elementary level the convention does not require that children’s education in these areas is extended to this higher level. So, a suitable education will minimally require indicators of learning related⁵ to:

⁵ A more detailed analysis of the both the conventions on human rights and the rights of the child would

- (a) Development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities;
- (b) Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
- (c) Respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate and for civilizations different from his or her own;
- (d) Development of a responsible life in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all people, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
- (e) Respect for the natural environment.

Of course what is missing from this list is any form of clear modifiers about what constitutes the "elementary level" and some account of child development would need to be given to establish not only that the child has developed in these areas of content, but to a level commensurate with their ability. This is by no means a straightforward matter and is unlikely to be resolved by appeal to general theories of child development.

Given the definition of education discussed earlier; namely the development of dispositions, w, by methods, z, then any education on the above topics will need to conform to "suitable educational methods." This sets out the compulsory elements of any suitable education, though of course there is a considerable degree of flexibility in what this actually looks like in practice.

In addition to these compulsory aspects in educating a child we might reasonably claim to be seeking three possible outcomes: the development of personal attributes, the development of agency and the freedom for self-actualisation. All three aspects should be understood within the context of the need for education to make a significant contribution to the upbringing of the child. It is within such a framework that an account of a suitable education needs to be expressed, whilst recognising that there are real, valid and legitimate disagreements between these three approaches. The methods used need to be educational, and allow for the development of critical open-mindedness, yet at the same time be appropriate for the educational outcomes that are pursued by, and on behalf of the particular child.

offer a more complex, specific picture of what an education ought to develop. The different ways in which the conventions are interpreted in different jurisdictions would also throw light on this analysis. This paper is primarily concerned with sketching out the framework for a suitable *UK* education.

Conclusion

In this paper I have set out a broad account of a “suitable education,” grounded not in a discourse of schooling, but in the requirements of living in a liberal democracy, the international commitments of that democracy, and the nature and purpose of education as an element of upbringing. The first two of these elements emerge from the requirements of the State and are common to all forms of education of children, and the third emerges from the responsibilities of parents to support the upbringing of their children. I have attempted to *illustrate* this through a consideration of what each of these elements might look like if one makes certain assumptions about democratic states and what is required for the upbringing of children (see also Davies, 2013, for a school focused review of the same issues).

Although I have not developed an account of specific forms of educational practice, this does take us beyond that presently expressed in case law. Given the nature of education we should expect a level of uncertainty, complexity, and reasonable disagreement. However, for home educators wishing to review the “suitability” of their education for their children and who desire to enable their children to fulfil their potential then this sketches out a defensible landscape within which to conceptualise their reflections.

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