



The "S" Word Socialisation

The "S" word, socialisation, is by far the single most common issue raised by those encountering home education for the first time. It is mentioned on the DfES website in their advice to parents considering home education and it is the most frequently raised topic in feedback from this site.

So to save myself the trouble of rewriting the same e-mail several times a week I decided to add this to the site under a major menu item.

To an educationalist the term socialisation can mean either the process of teaching a child those rules and customs which govern the way a society works or it can mean a child's access to peer contact.

The two issues are linked since it is believed that children learn customs and rules by social contact. It is falsely assumed therefore by some educationalists that Home educating children will be socially inept.

The issue of socialisation is most often stated as a concern that if children are removed from school and educated in the home they will miss out on the necessary socialisation skills gained at school. This argument contains a number of questionable assumptions.

Firstly it is assumed that school is in some sense a model for the "real" adult world of work and recreation. In reality schools are an almost unique institution in society. Nowhere else do you find an homogenous group of individuals of the exact same age, grouped together to complete the same task, each often working in isolation to the others in the group, with one person (the only one of a different age present) in control of the process.

It is also erroneously believed that children need many others of the same age around them. This begs the question why? Why should it be wise to remove children from society, place them in an environment with little input from adults and call it socialisation? It seems to me that many of the problems, stresses and anxieties that particularly teenage children suffer from stem from the lack of social contact they have with other members of society who have already gone through the many transitions and transformations that they are experiencing. The lack of input from adults in the lives of schooled teenage children is as shocking as it is unnatural.

I believe that school gives our young people a distorted view of life. It removes children from the realities of society and places them in the hands mostly of other children. Those few adults they do encounter become authoritative fonts of knowledge and reduces all children into passive receivers of whatever the adult deigns to pass on is this natural or real? In no other setting are people organised so strictly by age and ability (not to mention gender, race, neighbourhood etc.). They are presented with facts they are required to learn which may or may not be of any interest or utility and then they are periodically tested for their take-up of said facts.

The state reacts badly to those children who fail to adapt or fit into the school system. Currently its fad like response is to label the child as ADHD, or some other pseudo scientific term. In the United States this has reached such a pass that senior schools employ persons responsible for handing out the medication, psycho-active medication that was intended for



adults and has never been tested on children whose brains are still developing. We therefore have the state defining children who don't fit into school as being psychologically deviant and in need of medication to modify their behaviour so that they can be controlled and fitted into the setting. Is this really what we want for our kids, is this socialisation, and most of all would it be acceptable to systematically do this to adults?

The social skills learned in such a place are of little use to them in other settings. The only place school socialises children for is school and perhaps other institutions. If you want to socialise children for life in their community children should be educated in their community.

It is a common misunderstanding of home education (one that is often shared by LA's and government departments) that children are educated in the isolation of their homes.

Such misunderstandings are partly the fault of the term "home education" it would be better that our children were known as home based learners or some other term that more closely reflects the reality such as community based learning as some members of the home education community have argued for.

Most home educated children spend a considerable amount of time using the resources they find in their community. This more open approach provides home-educated children with the interpersonal skills necessary for them to make the most of such encounters. Thus acquiring skills more closely related to those they will need as adults. Furthermore, because learning within the community detaches the concept of learning from institutions it promotes a sense of personal responsibility to education and life generally along with an attitude to learning which encourages life long commitment to self-improvement.

It is also held that children need the relationships of friends in school, particularly the interpersonal contact provided by the playground. It is inherent in this argument that it is supposed that children need to be subjected to contact with the very large numbers of other children one encounters only in the school play ground otherwise they will be incapable of forming healthy relationships later in life.

The idea that one must be subjected to an environment where hundreds of children, who are often stressed from the classroom, are released into a mostly empty space to release that tension for short periods is one where they will develop the skills necessary for healthy interpersonal relationships later in life is frankly laughable.

The playground is another almost unique environment. It is not a model for later behaviour indeed it is a byword for immaturity and lack of judgement. Most bullying, endemic in the school environment occurs in the playground.

It has even been argued that bullying in the work place is a behaviour learned in the playground. Research shows that most workplace bullies were playground bullies.

It could be argued that far from being a positive influence on children, school could actually be a negative one. Despite the rhetoric of the apologists of the education system (mostly those who earn a living by teaching in it) the overwhelming influence of school is peer pressure with little input from adults.

It is rare that home educators find themselves isolated. Even if there are few local home educators (and with 50,000 of us or an average of 2 in every two square miles that's not a common experience) there will be other schooled children who are available for contacts



after school. There are also youth organisations and clubs not to mention siblings. Additionally E-mail, letters and the telephone provide invaluable resources.

In general, the overwhelming majority of home educators regard the socialisation issue as a non issue raised primarily by those new to the idea. It is rarely an issue for home educators who have been "doing it" for any length of time in fact generally the only problems it raises is fitting it all in.