

Badman report

The government agents continue in the great tradition of the 'dodgy Iraq dossier' with answers to the questions being what the government wants and not what the evidence shows,

The home-based education network of organisations, the social workers, the police and the press have established that the bad news and bad cases of home-based education are very hard to find. I have found in my investigations since 1977 that the bad cases are so rare that inspectors, and just occasionally journalists, invent them. The present network of home-based education groups, social workers, police and the press are an adequate detection service for the rare cases. (In contrast, the bad news about schools is located and reported almost daily, and a motive for some families is that home-based education provides a much safer environment than schools. The evidence supports them - exposure to knives, drugs, petty crime, alcohol, smoking, bullying etc., are school-based problems.) The forthcoming report by Professor Clive Harber on *Toxic Schooling* assembles some of the key evidence on this.

Home-based educated children do not report the feelings of resentment, the boredom or the bad habits created by schools. The evidence in UK, USA, Canada and elsewhere shows that they are, on average, two years ahead of their schooled counterparts, and in the case of working class children closer to three years ahead. The families have been shown to be active in community groups of all kinds. It is rare for home-educated young people to be unemployed.

Home-based education and the problem of the competence of inspectors

Education inspectors are rarely competent to judge home-based education, except in the minority of cases where families adopt school-type formal courses and structures. This was acknowledged over 25 years ago in *Harrison v. Stevenson* 1981 where the judge accepted the submission of the Harrison family that the reports presented by Dr. James Hemming and Dr Roland Meighan were valid, as against the Local Authority Inspectors reports, because they had a clear understanding of the logistics of autonomous education, and the LEA Inspectors did not.

The fact is that LEA Inspectors have only been trained in one approach to education – the authoritarian, based on crowd instruction and crowd control and the dictum of 'you will do it our way, or else'. It is also known as the day prison model or the battery-hen model. When they try to evaluate home-based education conducted on autonomous educational principles, we have a situation where basketball experts are, in effect, trying to judge a game of tennis. Admittedly, both have nets, balls and a court but these similarities are deceptive and lead to absurd propositions like 'the tennis players did not produce evidence of dribbling skills', and the racquets did not appear to produce any scoring of baskets'.

So, Inspectors often report that 'little teaching was in evidence'. Autonomous education uses purposive conversation, a method on average, five times as effective as uninvited formal teaching. Next, 'they did not follow the National Curriculum' No, because the appropriate curriculum for autonomous education is the Catalogue Curriculum. And so on, - I will not labour the point.

Those inspectors wanting to get up to date need to consult the 30 years of literature available on modern home-based education – they can make a start with *Comparing Learning Systems* by Roland Meighan.

Some Policy Issues

The role of government in a democracy as regards home-based education is encouragement, information and support, not domination. **All** parents should be informed of the home-based education option and those who choose it given support and information, not interference. Flexischooling should be on offer at all schools, and headteachers need to have their veto on such arrangements **removed at once**.

Education Otherwise and similar organisations could form a monitoring body if given the finance and resources to perform this task well. OFSTED and LEAs are not competent to do this task having been trained only in the authoritarian crowd instruction and crowd control approach to learning - 'you will do it our way, or we will find something nasty to do to you'.

Footnote

The last time an attack on home-based education of this kind appears to be that of Bernhard Rust, education minister of the Third Reich, who set about destroying the autonomy of families, such as the Von Trapp family featured in *The Sound of Music*, in order to produce the mass processed, submissive young people that the leaders required.

A Kind of Treason ... ?

by Roland Meighan

You can get very tired of people voicing their ill-considered views about home-based education with no apparent knowledge of the research of the last 30 years in UK, USA, Canada, Australia and elsewhere on the subject. They are also forgetful of the dire effects of 'compulsory mis-education', as Goodman put it, in the day-prison system of learning called schools.

One response is to point out that their comments on home-based education might be construed as a kind of treason. After all, the Queen is a home-based education graduate, so accusations of 'missing out on socialisation', 'no exposure to approved forms of knowledge', etc., must apply to the monarch. The response to this line of argument is usually an uncomfortable silence.

Those who prefer Presidents democratically elected to unelected monarchs can look at the USA situation where of the 42 or so past presidents, 17 were home-based education graduates. Moreover, the various studies trying to rank them in order of success, consistently put the first five as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson and Theodore Roosevelt. Yes, you have guessed it – they are all home-based education graduates.

There is a second kind of treason, to the evidence of other well-known people who were home-educated. Thus, Yehudi Menuhin went to school for only one half day. *"When I came back from the morning, my mother asked me what I had learnt. I said, 'I really didn't learn anything. I sat at the back of the class, and there was a little window high upon the wall, through which I could see branches. I hoped that a bird would alight. No bird alighted, but I kept hoping',* and that's about all I could report. So my mother promptly said, *"Well, we'll educate you at home."* He got on well enough without school to become a world-class violinist.

Patrick Moore, the astronomer and broadcaster, was educated at home and did not go to university. He tells us that he chose his curriculum at the age of seven as learning to type, which he thought would be useful, by copy typing some tomes in astronomy. This, he thought, would inform him about the subject that interested him, and would also serve as a course in improving his English. He would also spend some time on his xylophone and later the piano developing his musical skills. This 'unbalanced curriculum' served him well, he explains, since the central activities of his life have been astronomy, journalism and music. All other knowledge and skills that he needed were gained incidentally on a 'need to know' basis.

Then there was the Headteacher of Wolverhampton Grammar School who was a party to educating his two daughters at home until they were eleven because the local primary school was not able to facilitate a personalized learning system to take into account their own keen learning interests in gymnastics and music.

Bertrand Russell, distinguished philosopher and mathematician, was another home-based education graduate. He observed that: *"I was glad I did not go to school. I would have had no time for original thought, which has been my chief stay and support in troubles."*

The roll-call of well-known people can take up a whole book – see *An “A” in Life: Famous Home Schoolers* by Mac and Nancy Plent (1999) Unschoolers Network. It includes George Bernard Shaw, Charlie Chaplin, Claude Monet, Thomas Edison, Andrew Carnegie, The Wright brothers (the aeroplane inventors), Agatha Christie, Noel Coward, Margaret Mead, Pearl Buck, C.S.Lewis, John Stuart Mill, two Wimbledon tennis champions, and several contemporary film actors.

There is also a third kind of treason, to the respect for research evidence, which shows that the bad news about home-based education is very hard to find and confined to a few odd cases – reported in the press, for I have never come across any myself and I have encountered thousands of home-based educating families in the years I have been researching the subject. The *Home Education Research Journal* has been publishing systematic studies on home-based education for over 30 years in USA. The research shows that, in the vast majority of cases, home-based education is a good news story. Mike Fortune Wood's two books, *The Face of Home –based Education 1: Who, Why and How*, and *The Face of Home-based Education 2: Numbers, Support, Special Needs*, are two recent surveys of the scene in UK showing the same outcome.

Members of the establishment, despite showing the signs of being damaged by their mis-education at school themselves, can be won over in time. Thus, a school inspector, quoted in D. Smith, *Parent Generated Home Study in Canada*, 1993, said: “I so wish I'd given my daughter the opportunity you're giving your sons.”