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Home Education Regulations in Europe and Recent U.K. Research

Lesley Ann Taylor
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Home education is the education of children in and around the house by their parents or by those appointed by the parents. It can be seen as a temporary or permanent alternative to the education which is provided by the state or by private schooling. (Petrie, 1993, p. 139)

Home schooling has clearly caught the imagination of the American public as we approach the 21st century. Whether it is called home schooling, home education, home-based education, or home-centered learning, this age old practice has experienced a rebirth and taken hold in every state of the Union. (Ray, 1997, p. ix)

Children are born, they learn to walk, they learn to talk, they go to school. Schooling is now so ingrained in our culture we have come to believe there can be no education without it. In line with this, almost every-

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thing done to improve the quality of education through research and innovation, is based on the assumption that schooling and education are interchangeable terms. ... Yet, while good classroom practice no doubt maximizes learning within the classroom, it does not follow that there may not be other equally or more efficient ways in which children can learn. (Thomas, 1998, pp. 1, 53)

This article looks at the legal situation of home educators in the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe, outlines the law that applies to home education in the United Kingdom and France in detail, summarizes some of the more recent U.K. research, and considers ways in which recent home education research in the United Kingdom compares with that in the United States.

An Overview of the Legal Situation in Europe

Home education during the 19th and early 20th centuries was considered a natural form of education in all European countries. It is only during the 20th century that some governments have sought to limit this form of education. Sometimes the limitation has been for political reasons, as in Germany. Other governments have encouraged the child's right to education, and legislators, aware of schooling and unaware of home education, inadvertently have confused compulsory education and compulsory schooling. In Spain and France, very stringent laws were enacted because a very few children were involved in small schools of extreme religious sects, and home educators in those countries subsequently were restricted. It would seem that in those instances, information about home educators and their children and home education research results had not been studied before decisions were made by the legislators involved.

In a study of legislation concerning home education in Western European countries, Petrie (1995) found countries that

- Accommodate home educators and always have done so (Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, most of Switzerland, United Kingdom).
- Have not permitted home education sometime in the past, but now do so (Austria).
- Now no longer permit home education in the word of the law but would appear to permit individual instances (Spain, Greece, two Swiss cantons, the Netherlands, Germany).

The exact numbers of home educators in each country are difficult to come by for a variety of reasons. In some countries, children who have never been to school are not required to register with the authorities. Even where it is difficult to home educate, as in Germany, children are educated at home, but the parents often do not make themselves known to others. Not all families belong to home educating support groups.

Along with differing laws throughout Europe, there are differing demands placed on home educating parents. In the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, parents are responsible for providing a suitable education. In Norway, the law reads that students have the right and obligation to attend the basic school unless they are receiving a corresponding education from some other source. In Norway and also in Portugal, home-educated students must register with the local school. In Austria, the students must follow the national curriculum and are tested on it annually, and in Luxembourg, students' education must be equal with that of school. In Italy, it is traditionally the father who has a responsibility to God to see that his children are educated.

Germany is the only country where permission to home educate is extremely rare. No exceptions to the compulsory schooling laws are made for Traveler¹ children to be educated at home by their parents or via correspondence courses; these children are expected to attend boarding schools (Liegeois, 1987). In addition, home education is not permitted for river craft children. In other countries, such as the Netherlands, there is a more flexible approach that permits such families to maintain their own culture and way of life.

Some families who wished to home educate have left Germany and moved to other European countries or the United States to home educate. Petrie (1995) gave two examples. The first involved Tilmann, a child who suffered from severe school phobia. Initially, when the doctor decided Tilmann was too ill to go to school, he was taught at home by a qualified secondary school teacher. A 2-year legal process began that was "resolved" when he felt well enough to attend school. Two years later, when he was again unable to face school, his parents sent him to stay for a year with friends in the United States. When he returned, the family subsequently moved to Switzerland to live in a canton where home education is permitted. The second case involved Danny, whose mother Renata Leuffen wanted to home educate him, mainly for religious reasons. Leuffen took her case to the European court, but she did not secure the right to home educate her son in Germany. She moved to London to con-

¹The term *Traveler* is used here to refer to peoples of Romany origin who move location for the major part of the year, selling handcrafted products and finding seasonal employment.

tinue home educating him; the education she provided was monitored by the Local Education Authority (LEA) and thought to be satisfactory.

An American family in Germany was prosecuted for home educating three children and fined approximately \$2,300.00 (U.S.) per child; it has been reported that there are other German home educating families who also have been fined by the German government and face possible jail sentences (Grimes & Grimes, 1999).

On December 18, 1998, an Act was passed in France limiting the role of home education. Prior to this, home educators had been able to provide an education suitable to each individual child that was monitored by the regional administration when the child was 8, 10, and 12 years old. Any disputes between families and the education authorities (e.g., over the definition of *suitable education*) were decided by a visit of a representative from the Ministry of Education in Paris. The Loi No. 98-1865 now enforces compulsory registration at the local town hall and visits to the home by an employee of the Academie de l'Education and by sociologists and psychologists. If parents refuse to comply with these regulations, they can be fined 50,000 francs or have a 6-month prison sentence. The areas that the home-educated child must study are also specified:

- The French language, both written (in grammar and expression) and spoken, and a knowledge of French culture, based on literature.
- Principles of mathematics (specified in detail).
- At least one foreign language.
- The history and geography of France, Europe, and the world.
- Science and technology.
- Art and culture.
- Participation in sport.

In addition, the child must be able to

- Ask questions.
- Propose reasoned answers from observations and written evidence.
- Prove reasoning ability.
- Devise a plan of work, conduct research, and produce finished work.
- Master information technology and use it to communicate with others.
- Approach things in a mature way, using available resources and evaluating risks.

Depending on ability, the child must be at a level in all subjects similar to a child who is attending school.

The discussion in the Assemblée Générale [Parliament] (1998–1999–45ème jour, 115ème séance du Jeudi 10 Decembre 1998) centered around a belief (expressed by M. Patrick Leroy) that at least 6,000 children between the ages of 6 and 16 did not attend school and that these children were subjected to the influence of sects and dogmatic manipulation under the auspices of original education programs. The children were at risk of being marginalized and incapable of developing an independent critical spirit:

Il faut donc renforcer le contrôle de l'enseignement dispensé à ces enfants, pour s'assurer que les valeurs fondatrices de la République, la citoyenneté et la laïcité au premier chef, leur sont bien inculquées [It is thus necessary to be better able to verify the teaching given to these children, to be confident that the essential values of the Republic—citizenship and a high degree of secularity—are well impressed upon them.]

Mr. Leroy stated that only in schools provided by the Republic could the child learn to have an open spirit and personality and be aware of the world around him or her. He spoke against Jehovah's Witness groups in almost the same breath as the Reverend Moon, the Citadelle sect, and Krishna. At the end of his speech, he was applauded in each section of the parliament. Various other deputies spoke in a similar vein. The general discussion makes depressing reading for those knowledgeable about home education and the benefits that it can bring to individual children. There seemed to be no speaker prepared to support their needs. The broad spectrum of home educators and the great variety of education that they provide were ignored. Details of the proceedings, the Acts, and the further qualifying circular are given in Editions 5, 6 and 7 of *Grandir Sans Ecole*, the web site of *Possible* (www.multimania.com/possible), and the government web site (www.legifrance.gouv.fr/citoyen/officiels.ow/).

There is a general belief among home educators in France that when the inspector, who is used to monitoring schooling, makes a home visit, it will be possible to find fault with one aspect of all the regulations, and that many parents could unwittingly default on their responsibilities. In addition, it probably will be extremely difficult for non-French speakers to comply with the regulations. There are German, Dutch, and English families, educating children in their own language, who live for some time in France (longer than the permitted 6 months nonresidency), so that their children can "pick up" a foreign language and be aware of other ways of living. Some such home educators already have reluctantly returned to England. These and other concerns are expressed in the publications of the home educating support groups in France.

Compulsory Education in England and Wales

Education is compulsory in England and Wales for children between the ages of 5 and 16, but, although ensuring an education for every child, the law has never made schooling compulsory. The legal limitations that currently apply to home education are the 1996 Education Act, Statutory Instrument 1995 No. 2089, and clarifications that have been made in the courts and by the Ombudsman (Petrie, 1998, p. 124). The relevant section of the 1996 Education Act for home educators that currently applies is Section 7:

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.

The general definition of *education* and the definition of *efficient education* as it relates to home education were discussed in *Harrison and Harrison v. Stephenson* (1982 QB [DC] 729/81). A lower court had accepted an “autonomous method of self-directed study, recognisable as such by educationalists, and which could properly be described as systematic and which was certainly full-time.” The term *efficient* was defined as achieving “that which it sets out to achieve.” The court stated that “the education of these children had achieved that which [the Harrisons] had set out to achieve, with striking success.”

The judge also stated that

by any standard, education, however efficient it may be, is only suitable to the age, ability and aptitude of a child if

- (a) it is such as to prepare a child for life in a modern civilised society and
- (b) it enables a child to fulfil its best potential
- ... (iii) that the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic are fundamental to any education for life in the modern world as being essential for communication, research and self-education. We would not regard any system of education as suitable for any child capable of learning such skills, if that education failed to attempt to instil them (whatever the chosen method) but left it to time, chance and the inclination of the child to determine whether, if ever, the child was to attain even elementary proficiency in them.

The appeal by the Harrisons to the higher court contested that an education should be *systematic*. The appeal court judges believed that al-

though it might not always be so, for the two Harrison children concerned, the education should be systematic because they were dyslexic. The judge stated,

The local education authority has a duty to see that the children are properly educated. Included in that duty is something more than just seeing that the parents are doing what they like about the children. There comes a stage when, in certain circumstances, children have to be protected against the views of their parents, if those views are held with a high degree of tenacity which may ultimately be damaging to the children. ... [Children] are not possessions of their parents, and parents must realize that they are not totally in control of their children's lives ... if the children are not sent to school in accordance with a school attendance order then the only way in which parents can resist prosecution is by showing ... that the child is receiving efficient full-time education suitable to its age, ability and aptitude otherwise than at school.

Appropriately for a long-standing democracy, parents in England and Wales have a large measure of freedom to select the curriculum and pedagogy of their choice suitable for the education of their children. The 1988 Education Reform Act established a National Curriculum. This was the first time there were national guidelines on curriculum content for children of primary (5–11) and secondary (11–16) age. It does not apply to home educators. It only applies to children who are registered in maintained schools (i.e., state schools or state-supported schools). Some independent and religious schools follow the National Curriculum by choice.

Local government, in particular the LEA, is responsible for education within the area; it thus is responsible for ascertaining that home-educated children known to them are being educated:

If it appears to a local education authority that a child of compulsory school age in their area is not receiving suitable education, either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, they shall serve a notice in writing on the parent requiring him to satisfy them within the period specified in the notice that the child is receiving such education. (Education Act, 1996, § 437[1])

It only becomes the responsibility of an LEA when it knows that a child is being home educated. A parent of a child who has never attended school is not legally bound to inform the LEA of the decision to home educate. However, if a child already is attending school, the parent who decides to home

educate must notify the head teacher, who in turn must remove the child's name from the attendance register and notify the LEA.

Thus, it is the responsibility of parents, the LEAs, and sometimes the courts to ensure a child is receiving a suitable education. Although some home educators enjoy a positive relationship with LEA officials, others have had negative experiences. Four areas of potential conflict were identified by Petrie (1998):

- LEA representative comparing the education provided at home with that in school. This can cause problems for parents educating in an autonomous style that is dissimilar to education in school.
- The varying definitions of words such as *full-time*, *efficient*, and *socialization*. The majority of officials are particularly concerned that home education might involve a lack of contact with others.
- LEA officials who monitor home education not always being trained in monitoring the variety of provision of education.
- Frequency of monitoring. It has not been clarified how often home educators should be monitored. A few home educating families believe that after the initial assessment to ascertain that an education is taking place there should be no further visits. In some LEAs, visits can take place 1–3 times per academic year. In one instance 10 visits per year were recorded. (Petrie, 1992)

However, the LEA has no automatic right to visit the home. The courts have clarified that evaluation of the education provided can take place in other places, agreed to in advance by both LEA officials and the parents concerned (*R v. Surrey Quarter Sessions Appeals Committee ex Parte Tweedie* [1963] 61, LGR, 464 [DC] 1208, 1209).

There currently is a reasonable balance in England and Wales between home educating parents and LEAs that benefits the home-educated children concerned. Any differences are clarified in the courts.

The Number of Home-Educated Children in England and Wales

It is difficult to establish the number of home-educated children with any accuracy. Estimates of the number of home-educated children largely have been based on those families known to LEAs, but not all home-educated children are known to them. For the period 1988 to 1992, Lowden (1994) and Petrie (1992) gave figures of approximately 4,000 recognized by LEAs. In 1995, a follow-up study by Petrie suggested that the

number known to them had increased to 6,000. LEA officials, even those who are conscientious, rarely “discover” home educators who are not known to them. Families who are not known to them, to legally be considered as home educating, must fulfill the requirement laid down in the *Harrison* case that a child educated at home must receive “the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic [which] are fundamental to any education for life in the modern world as being essential for communication, research and self-education” (*Harrison and Harrison v. Stephenson* (1982 QB [DC] 729/81)). Petrie believes that with this definition, the number of home-educated children is unlikely to be more than 15,000. This figure was validated by a snap survey of individuals who have been supporting home educators for a number of years, who variously suggested between 8,000 and 15,000 home-educated children.

HERALD, a home educating support group, suggested that in Gloucestershire, the LEA only knew of 25% of the home educating population. The LEA’s knowledge of home educators may depend on attitudes of the LEA staff and the frequency of previous court cases in the area. Meighan (1997) suggested that there might be as many as 50,000. Rothermel (1997c) increased this number still further, but her numbers included children whose status might not comply with definitions of education established in court cases.

National Exams and University Entrance

In England and Wales, most school children prepare for national exams (General Certificate of Education, or GCSE) at the age of 16, and some continue to take further exams (Advanced Level, or A-Level) at age 18. Home educating families resolve the acquisition of qualifications in a variety of ways. The family can decide that

- There is no great need for exams either in general or in the case of a specific child.
- The child should go to a school or a further education college (usually 16–18).
- They wish to continue home educating, study for the exams at home, and undertake the exam in a designated examination center.

Most exams now have a course work element, which can create difficulties because it must be completed and validated well ahead of the formal exam. Assuming it can be validated, an examination center also must be found in which to sit the exam. Some students must travel considerable

distances. Home-educated students must pay for the exam (and an adjudicator, in some instances) because the exams are only free to those children educated in the state system. Open learning centers and other organizations offer tuition for exams, some by correspondence course, but this also involves cost to the family.

Some home-educated children enroll in courses and sit their exams in Further Education Colleges, which offer a more flexible adult learning environment; this is part of the state provision of education and, as such, it is free. The colleges offer technical and both GCSE and A-Level courses. For A-Level, students currently study one to four subjects in depth. For entry to university, the minimum requirement is usually five GCSE passes, including two at A-Level. More A-Levels with higher grades may be required to enter the preferred university.

Home Education Support Groups in the United Kingdom and France

United Kingdom

The original support group was created more than 100 years ago by Charlotte Mason (Parents National Education Union, now Worldwide Education Service). Petrie is conducting research that shows that it was frequently used between the two world wars by people who were home educating. Many also used this correspondence course when living abroad. It gave practical suggestions of both academic and fun things to do with children.

Education Otherwise (EO). (P.O. Box 7420, London, N9 9SG). The name *education otherwise* comes from the wording of the Education Acts of 1944 and 1996 and explains the British term *otherwise education*, which sometimes is used to refer to home education.

EO is the largest of all the home education support groups in the United Kingdom. It was formed by a small group of parents in 1977. It is a self-help organization with a nationwide team of volunteers who offer their expertise to support others. It aims to help parents choose the right kind of education for their own situation and does not promote any one right way of educating all children. Members include those families who are practicing home education, those who are considering home education, and those who support the principle of home education. It benefits from local area coordinator support and can help, for example, with the

process of deregistering a child and advice with home education for special needs children. It produces a contact list and a bimonthly newsletter, organizes local meetings and national gatherings, and provides free or reduced entry to a variety of educational sites across the country.

A further aim of EO is to raise awareness that although education is compulsory, school is not, and that families can legally choose to home educate.

Home Service. (The Hawthorns, 48 Heaton Moor Road, Heaton Moor, Stockport, SK4 4NX). Home Service is a national self-help organization providing support for Christian home educating families. It established the first national U.K. telephone service for Christian home educators. It was established in 1992 with about 20 families and now has a mailing list of 300. It has close links with the Christian Home Schools Contact List, which produces a quarterly magazine called *Home Time*, the first U.K. newsletter for Christian home educators.

Home Education Advisory Service. (P.O. Box 98, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire, AL8 6AN). The Home Education Advisory Service (HEAS) also provides a national home education support network. HEAS was established as a national charity in 1995 to provide reliable support and consistent information to home educators across England. It offers quarterly bulletins and a registration card for free and reduced-rate access to places of interest. It also runs a central daily telephone hotline for information about home education. It has chosen not to operate with voluntary local coordinators, but prefers a centrally run organization to provide a more consistent interface with home educators, LEAs, and the media.

Home Education Resource and Learning Development (HERALD). (Kelda Cottage, Lydbrook, Gloucestershire, GL17 9SX). HERALD was established in 1997 and claims to offer " ... a stepping stone between the rigors of schooling and the autonomous approach which many home-based educators strive to achieve by suggesting a structured yet flexible framework as a basis for study." Student work schemes are part of the membership package. The founders of the organization realized that some people, especially those who have just removed a child from school, were not sure how to approach the task of home education; although not advocating a very structured school day, some rhythm or pattern to the home educator's day could be beneficial for both parents and children. HERALD organizes very specific but flexible practical

support for home educators. A 5-day work plan for each week is produced that encourages parents to give five tasks a day to children. The work plan covers all aspects of the curriculum that would be found in schools. Topic-based schemes are sent out three times a year with comprehensive notes suggesting ways to organize the child's education. Parents are encouraged to produce a daily journal both for themselves and for LEA inspectors who might show an interest.

Northstar UK. (www.northstar-academy.org/UK/). Northstar UK is a community of 11- to 16-year-old learners. Christian teachers aim to provide a flexible online learning environment emulating traditional school interactions with lectures, discussions, social chatter, peer learning, group work, and student presentations. Northstar UK is not an online school; rather, it aspires to create a new institutional context within which learning can take place. Using conferencing software called *FirstClass*, tutors provide tutorial support, facilitate group discussion, and mark assignments. Northstar UK offers a U.K.-produced curriculum leading to GCSE. Not only can students study when they want to, but they can study as much or as little of Northstar UK curriculum that suits them. Northstar UK is available for home educating families, missionary families, and small Christian schools at home and abroad. However, students must find their own examination centers and make their own arrangements to sit the exams. There are some links with Northstar in the United States.

There are other specialist group networks for home educators, of which we provide some examples.

Schoolhouse (Scotland). (311 Perth Road, Dundee, DD2 1LG; Tel: 01382 646964; E-mail: jafkd@lineone.net; <http://www.welcome.to/schoolhouse>). Schoolhouse is a national Scottish charity, providing information and support about home education in Scotland.

Catholic Home-schooling Network. (P.O. Box 52, Skegness, PO25 1UE). This is an informal network for Catholic families who are educating children at home. There is a newsletter and a resources list.

France

It has been estimated by Sophie Haesen, editor of the newsletter *Grandir Sans Ecole*, that there are about 2,200 children who are home educated in France and about 12,000 children who are taught with the state correspondence course, both within France and abroad.

Grandir Sans Ecole. (B P 5, 68480 Ferrette). This publication is produced quarterly to inform home educators about legal developments and the possibilities of home educating using different educational philosophies. It also includes articles written by home educators from a variety of countries. Books are reviewed, and home educators can make contact with others.

Les Enfants d'Abord. (Elyane Delmares, La Croix Saint Fiacre, 03110 Vendat). This is a home educating support group with four newsletters annually. They are edited by a member family and contain accounts of home education by the members. There is a membership list for those members who are home educating. Regional groups organize meetings to support home educators and discuss current issues. The annual national meeting is held in a different location each year involving as many of the members as possible.

Possible. This organization is concerned with the dissemination of information about all forms of alternative education, including home education. In the newsletters and the web page there are articles about the law, differing philosophies of education, and extracts from other journals of interest to members. Information is available from www.multimania.com/possible.

Recent Home Education Research in the United Kingdom Compared With the U.S. Research

The Context of Four U.K. Studies

Home education research in the United Kingdom is rarely funded and is therefore not as extensive as that conducted in the United States, where it sometimes is funded by the government (e.g., Lines, 1991), by the National Home Education Research Institute (e.g., Ray, 1997), or by the Home School Legal Defense Association (e.g., Rudner, 1999). However, details of four studies undertaken in the U.K. setting by Goymer, Page, Rothermel, and Thomas are given here.

Stephen Goymer (in press), who is head of special needs in a large comprehensive school (2,000 pupils) in Norwich, studied seven families in Norfolk, England. The families came from contacts with students in his school, with friends and family acquaintances, and with EO. The families all practiced home education on a nonreligious basis, although they may have belonged to a religious group or have had their own religious philosophy. The research is ongoing, but in an initial analysis, some findings resonated with those of three Christian home educating families in the United States studied by L. A. Taylor (1993). Taylor studied these families in depth, and they are listed subsequently and compared with Goymer's research.

In L. A. Taylor's Home School 1, mother Joan talked about keeping many of the worldly distractions at bay and expressed concerns about peer pressure; Goymer found this concern raised in his study especially among the families with daughters. Joan also expressed a fear of her children being distracted in school and wasting time as she had done; Goymer found that two families expressed a concern that the children would have the same problems in school as the mother had exhibited. Finally, one of Goymer's families, like Joan, taught the children as she had been taught, perhaps without realizing that the school model is only one of many possible ways to educate.

In L. A. Taylor's Home School 2, mother Susan designated an area of the house as a schoolroom area; Goymer found two of his families did this. Also, Goymer's families shared Susan's experience of not liking what she observed at the local school. Susan's opinion, which was shared by people in four of Goymer's families, was that schools do not work children hard enough and do not stretch them. Susan's husband Robert stated that it is possible to affect the children's character, manner, and thinking more easily at home, and this was a sentiment shared by three of Goymer's families. All of Goymer's families shared Susan's belief that closer relationships between parents and children were established by parents living out their lives in front of the children, thus permitting children to see parents as they really are. Other examples of areas of similarity were theme days with other home educators, lots of read-aloud time, networking projects with other groups so parents or older children take some teaching responsibility, and families learning new skills together (e.g., bicycle maintenance). A concern to make the child feel important was expressed by Susan and shared by all the families in Goymer's sample. Some off-the-shelf curriculum was used by Susan, and Robert did a little of the teaching. In Goymer's group, similarly, some off-the-shelf curriculum was used, and some of the fathers became involved in teaching. Just as Susan stressed the role of teacher as guide, so did all of Goymer's families.

In L. A. Taylor's Home School 3, the mother Martha mentioned that when her oldest daughter returned to school for fifth grade, she found a lot of time wasted—a focus on irrelevant issues (such as how to shape the letter "A"), competition, and grade chasing. In Goymer's group, three of the four families who returned children to some aspect of mainstream schooling reflected these concerns. Martha stressed that learning should be seen as part of life; home and school learning activities should not be separated. All of Goymer's families held this philosophy. Martha's family had made good progress when compared to schooled peers on test scores. All but one of Goymer's families found the same result.

However, although the previous comparison indicated that there were some similarities between the three Christian home educating families

that L. A. Taylor studied in the Stanford, California, area and the seven families Goymer studied in Norfolk, England, Taylor believed there may be fundamental differences between the Christian home educators in both places. John Hay (whose work in Christian education addresses some of the inadequacies of the Christian schools movement; see, e.g., Hay, 1998) stated that

These schools often looked to the programs and “successes” of the public schools as their model. Instead of developing unique and alternative (Biblical) approaches to education, they just followed, instead of led. Because of this, many have compromised Biblical standards and become not unlike their secular counterparts. The pressure to conform to government accreditation standards, etc. has also influenced this conformity. (John Hay, personal communication, May 31, 1999)

L. A. Taylor’s (1993, 1997) research indicated that Christian home educators in the United States largely modeled home education on Christian schools; they accepted the traditional school paradigm and made wide use of curriculum originally marketed for private Christian schools. In contrast, in the United Kingdom, there has never been a large Christian schools movement; U.K. Christian home educators seem to choose a wider variety of paths and seem more ready to define models of education for themselves (L. A. Taylor, in press). As further evidence of this tendency, at a Christian home education conference at Cliff House in 1996, the keynote speaker ended with these words: “Now we have taken our children out of school, we need to decide what to do with them.” There was no assumption that the traditional school paradigm should be modeled in any way.

Page (1997) studied 20 home schooling families living within a 100-mile radius of his home in East Anglia, England. He described his sample as White, mostly Christian, and mainly well educated and noted that although the results were based on a limited and perhaps unrepresentative sample, the consistency of the results is very persuasive. In his sample, a traditional view of the family was held by all participants—that of the father, mother, and their children living together as one unit. He conducted his research by interview, in the form of a general discussion. He interviewed all 20 mothers and 11 of the fathers.

Page (1997) found that the parents all wanted to give their children a general education that included the formation of a well-rounded individual as well as good academic standards. The parents valued two things in particular: the one-to-one contact with their children that home education afforded and the freedom from such things as school hours and peer pressure. In addition, they enjoyed more family time, and, in some instances,

friendships within the family grew. They all tended to support other home educating families.

Parents were happy to confess to their children that they did not know something, and the child's education became an adventure for all the family. As Page (1997) noted, "One thing all the parents, who were deeply involved in the home schooling, had discovered was a new joy in learning; this was matched by their own children's joy in discovery" (p. 48). The mothers found deep meaning and contentment in their roles both as mothers and home educators; most of the fathers interviewed were much more involved in the life of the family as a consequence. Page concluded,

I began with the theological idea that we are not merely affected by our own actions, but actually formed by those actions. In this study of home schooling I have found that the parents are not merely forming their children but they are themselves being both formed and educated in the process. (p. 49)

Although some research has been done in the United States on how home educating parents perceive their home education (e.g., Knowles, 1988; McDowell, 1998; Medlin, 1994), Page's work seems to be unique in its focus on how mothers in particular have grown because of their home educating experience.

Paula Rothermel is in the last phase of a 4-year study exploring the aims and practices of home educators in the United Kingdom. Her study involved use of questionnaire data from 1,000 families and educational and psychological data for children of various age groups (including administration of Performance Indicators in Primary Schools, or PIPS; use of the Children's Assertiveness Behavior Scale, the Rutter Scale, and the Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Scale) and interview data with 100 families.

Although the study has not yet been published, Rothermel (1999a) reported the results from a pilot analysis of 50 completed questionnaires. This sample involved 123 children—16 with special needs—and 88 parents. She found 23% of the parents were trained schoolteachers, and, although there was no consensus on whether teacher training had helped or hindered them in their home education, there was a consensus that it had helped parents to communicate better with LEA staff. The national curriculum was followed by only 14% of the families, 28% referred to it occasionally, and 58% stated that they did not use it. Some kind of learning routine was followed by 74% of the families.

Reading skills were more spread than the normal distribution for children in schools, with more home-educated children reading either very early or very late. She noted that children with religious backgrounds read

the earliest. More recently, Rothermel (personal communication, June 26, 1999) found, when analyzing the National Literacy Project assessment results, that the percentage of U.K. home-educated “late readers” in her sample exactly replicated that of the national figure, as provided by the Department for Education and Employment (England and Wales).

Rothermel (1999b) provided results from the PIPS study of 36 four-year-olds. The sample was taken from the first 312 questionnaire returns. The initial sample were all found via an appeal in the EO newsletter, although not all respondents were EO members. Using a PIPS indicator, children aged 4 years were assessed at the beginning and end of a 9-month period. She tested children at the beginning and end of what would be their reception year in school. For the beginning of the year, the results were as follows: Her analysis of the PIPS baseline data indicated that 64% (23 children) scored over 75%; nationally, the figure for children scoring over 75% was 5.1%. The average score for the sample was 81%, whereas the national score was only 45%. In other words, the home-educated children were well ahead. However, when they were assessed 9 months later, the home-educated children had made less progress in terms of the PIPS measure than had their school-based counterparts, although being so far ahead in the beginning meant that many were still ahead of the schooled children. The national average score for mathematics was found to be 51.5%, and the average for the home-educated sample was 68.7%; the national average for reading was 44.9%, and the average for the sample was 59.3%. However, Rothermel (personal communication, June 23, 1999) believed that the difference could be accounted for by the fact that the tests—although apparently having universal appeal—are biased toward children in school, using data collection criteria adapted to a reception class environment.

Rothermel summarized the early indications of her study in four main findings:

1. The home educators came from mixed socioeconomic classes.
2. The educational methods adopted by the families varied. Parents adapted to individual children’s needs, where appropriate employing different approaches at varying stages of the child’s development.
3. In general, the children were competent social beings with the ability to interact with others, adults and peers alike, as equals. The children were generally confident and independent.
4. When subjected to a program of assessment measures attached to this research, the home-educated children (aged 4–11 years) were generally progressing more positively in developmental and academic terms than were their school counterparts.

Rothermel was keen to point out that these findings relate to the sample as a group and that there were exceptions at both extremes.

A nationwide study in the United States conducted by Ray (1997) collected data on 1,657 families and their 5,402 children. In that study, the students—like Rothermel's students—scored at above-average percentiles:

Total reading 87th percentile
Total language 80th
Total math 82nd
Total listening 85th
Science 84th
Social studies 85th
Study skills 81st
Basic battery (reading language and math) 85th
Complete battery 87th
The national average is the 50th percentile.

However, Ray's sample of parents had a higher than average educational attainment—46% of the fathers and 42% of the mothers had a bachelor's degree. Some might argue that this correlated with the high educational achievement of their youngsters. However, Havens (1991), Rakestraw (1988), and Ray (1992), who all studied the correlation between academic achievement and other variables, found no relation between the academic achievement of home-educated children and the educational attainment of their parents.

Rothermel's positive results for children's social development also confirm similar findings in the United States. J. W. Taylor (1986) studied self-concept among 224 home educators in Grades 4 through 12. He administered the Piers–Harris Self Concept Scale and found the home-schooled children scored significantly higher than did the public norm group on the global scale and on all six subscales. He concluded, "Insofar as self-concept is a reflector of socialization ... the findings of this study would suggest that few home-schooling children are socially deprived" (pp. 160–161).

Shyers (1992) studied 140 children, 70 of whom were traditionally schooled and 70 who were home educated. Using the Piers–Harris Self Concept Scale, he found that both groups of children had higher-than-average measured self-concept. However, using a technique in which children's behaviors are recorded by trained observers, the home-educated students received significantly lower problem behavior scores than did their traditionally schooled counterparts. He found that al-

though schooled children may not be socially well-adjusted, home-schooled children are socially well-adjusted.

Smedley (1992), in a study of 20 home-educated children and 17 traditionally educated students, used the Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scale to investigate the socialization issue from a communication perspective. Like Shyers, Smedley concluded, "The findings of this study indicate that children kept at home are more mature and better socialized than those who are sent to school" (p. 12). Rothermel's findings have supported those of both Shyers (1992) and Smedley (1992).

Thomas (1998) studied 50 home educating families in England and 50 in Australia to investigate how parents went about the day-to-day task of educating their children. From his findings, Thomas divided his families into three types: more formal learning, less formal learning, and informal learning. The tendency was for parents to become less formal as they proceeded. He made no claims for any one best method, but he stated that different methods worked well for different families at different times.

1. **Formal Learning.** This was the type most similar to a school situation, but there were several differences. Learning at home is more intensive, giving children more free time. It is flexible, so topics can be selected and pursued at length or dropped, and learning becomes more of a process than a series of tasks, so a parent becomes more of a guide than a teacher. When challenges arise, there is an attitude of "Let's sort it out" rather than a sense of failure on the part of the child or loss of self-worth. Children learn that an important part of learning is knowing how to find out.

2. **Less Formal Learning.** A second group operates less formally. These are parents who believe that children can learn a great deal without being deliberately taught.

3. **Informal Learning.** Others continue simply to "apprentice their children to the culture" as they did when the children were preschool age. Thomas concluded,

There can be few professional educators, or anyone else for that matter, who would expect much learning could accrue from simply living at home. There is no doubt, however, that school-age children who learn informally really do learn, which is intriguing at the very least. It challenges nearly every assumption about how children of school age should learn. (p. 67)

Thomas also noted that children learned to read anywhere between the ages of 2 and 12, and that this had no effect on their ultimate enjoyment of reading.

Conclusion

As policies in education are in a constant state of flux and change, home education, conducted for centuries according to the perceived needs of the child, is perhaps the only education by which the effectiveness of schooling can be measured; it therefore should only be regulated by governments in a limited way to protect the child from harm. Holt (1983) stated,

[Home education] is—in effect, though certainly not by design—a laboratory for the intensive and long range study of children's learning and of the ways in which friendly and concerned adults can help them learn. It is a research project, done at no cost, of a kind for which neither the public schools nor the government could afford to pay. (p. 393)

During the last 20 years, a large body of research has been conducted into home education in the United States. Initially in the United Kingdom, as in the United States, studies reflected an inadequate knowledge of the law and the need to clarify the legal boundaries. Gradually, a large body of research findings has emerged, documenting the successes of home schooling both academically and socially (Meighan, 1997; Ray, 1997). Some interesting studies on home educating families have been undertaken in the United Kingdom that reflect a research interest in both the families involved and the methods of teaching and learning employed. Some of the findings, such as those of Rothermel, were similar to those in the United States. Others, such as those of L. A. Taylor (in press), begin to pinpoint possible differences regarding the approach of Christian home educators. Much research remains to be done.

More important even than new research undertakings, however, is how (a) these research findings might be disseminated to legislators and those working in educational administration, (b) research into home education can be seen to be relevant to children in school and their parents, and (c) research into home education that has been undertaken in one country can be seen to be applicable to home educators in other countries.

It was quite apparent, for example, that the legislators in France either did not know or did not want to know the findings of international research from studies into home educating families or did not think they were relevant to education in France. In the United Kingdom, those working in education also can be unaware of home education research. Bentley (1998), who works for Demos (the independent think tank and research institute based in London) and who is an advisor to David Blunkett, a Member of Parliament and Secretary of State for Education and Employment, is one example. His book, hailed as one of the key education manuals of the decade (*Times Educational Supple-*

ment, October 23, 1998), made no reference to home education or to any of the major research findings of families' experiences of home education. In his last chapter, titled "New Landscape of Learning," he suggested that

From the age of 14, compulsory schooling might come to an end, to be followed by a number of different community-based learning packages which continued for five years or more. ... Young people would have the power to choose what they did, but this choice would be guided by a rich network of resources, guidance and support contexts for learning. The student's education would step outside the classroom, integrating diverse perspectives and experiences into a rounded, disciplined, individual view of the world. (p. 185)

Much of what Bentley suggested is already under way in many guises among home-educated children. They already can experience this "rounded, disciplined, and individual view of the world," supplemented by learning environments such as Northstar UK, if required. In addition, Bentley, in his concern to focus on social problems and how to resolve them through education, missed the fact that among home educators, many of these problems are resolving themselves. Home-educated children in general enjoy strong family ties and a healthy academic and social development.

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