

Speech on The Home education conference in Germany 27. – 29. of April:

HOME EDUCATION: THE NORDIC EXPERIENCE

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Thank you for the invitation. I am glad to be here. Germany is to day the important focal point for modern HE.

1. Introduction

The last 14 years I have been in near communication with modern home education. I have also done research on the field. This has given me a double role as both an HE advocate and an HE-academic. This situation has been a little schizophrenic!

Since the 1970-ies school is even more a mass education institution, taking more out of children`s time. HE today is a logical continuation of the deschooling movement in the 1970-ies. I find a direct line from Ivan Illichs idea about *de-schooling society* in the early1970-ies to modern HE.

Schools are like fabrics, mass-production institutions from the industrial society. Fabrics to day are only frames for post modern industrial and cultural production and shopping centra, but schools are still mass education institutions.

I see home education is an experiment for future education based on free choice inside and outside school. This is admitted, to example by Canadian researchers (Aurini and Davies). Mass education and global schooling have as effect a liberal shortfall of freedom in education. Home educators have gone into this vacuum as a revolutionary group.

HE problems, conflicts and dramatic cases we specially to day see here in Germany, to example the Konrad case in The European HR-court in Strasbourg and the case with Melissa Busekros and her family are refractions in creating a new epoch in education.

2. Modern home education in Norway

1991: the start	1995	2002	2006
3 families	40 pupils	Research:400	Today: 400 (?)
4 pupils	(unofficial)		

A Norwegian survey (2002) shows in Norway the same motives and the same groups of home educators as in other HE countries.

Conservative Christian middleclass

New radical cultural middleclass,

There is a different mix of these two groups in different countries. But in Norway the main HE-group is:

Christian, peasants and lower middleclass in rural areas with low educated parents.

In all HE-countries there also is a large group of:

Unknown home educators, to example Roman-people, unknown immigrants and social problems families.

Table 2 Home education groups in Norway

HE-group	Motives	Social class	Educational strategy
1) Conservative	Christian and pedagogic	Middle class	Traditional
2) Radical and cultural	Pedagogic ideological	Middle class	Unschooling
3) Pragmatic	Practical work	Peasant, rural working class and lower middleclass	Practical pedagogic orientation
4 Unknown	Withdrawing from society	Lower classes	None

Comparing Norwegian home educators with comparable groups in the population give:

Table 7.3 Comparing the HE-sample and actual population group.

Variables	HE-sample	Population group
Households income a year (Euro)	Ca 33.000	ca 56.000
Home working mothers (%)	45,3	28
Living in urban areas (%)	25,8	73,4
Number of brothers and sisters in the family	3,6	1,7
Mother only obligated education (9year) (%)	17,1	5,9
Father only obligated education (9 year) (%)	12,7	6,8

Norwegian home education has one speciality, the combination of HE and call for free-school with 85 % economical support from the state, when small public schools in rural areas are closed. From the closing date to the new free school can start (up to one year) some communities give their children “collective” home education in the public school building. This has given protest-noise from the school authorities, but they didn’t succeed to stop it. These cases give general attention to the relation HE/small free schools. An opening of the school-institution for more flexible education with some school and some home education is today an important issue in Norwegian HE.

In Norway supervision of HE is obligated by law. To day middle class HE has almost no supervision , but serious HE by working class HE in “special” families have extended supervision both from school authorities and social authorities, because the authorities are afraid this is “unknown” and unaccepted HE and sometimes not HE at all.

Norwegian modern HE had a start period (1991-2000) with strong conflicts and 3 court cases. But after a case in The Highest court which ended as a draw (football language) 2000 – 2006 is a liberal period. To day home educators are a little nervous for a new restricted period, not at least because of The Konrad-case. Three new restriction signs are:

No more right to school-leaving certificate (just an informal letter)

Sharpened authority-control with collective HE, which is defined as forbidden schooling.

School authorities are more negative to flexible solution with some school and some HE.

3. HE in The Nordic countries

In the 18th century, schools were established in Denmark, together with Norway, which at that time was a province of Denmark. Even though teaching was still rooted in the home, the school steadily took over. In Sweden, Finland, which was then governed by Sweden and in Iceland, literacy teaching continued for many years to be based in the home. Home education seems to have been an effective method of learning to read. A significantly higher proportion of the population of 18th-century in Sweden could read than was the case in Norway and Denmark. The Nordic history of education is grounded in populism and equality-values. This reflect today a splitting view on HE, positive to populism in HE, but also a negative fear of inequality and social segregation effects of HE.

Modern home education (HE) started in Nordic countries in the beginning of the 1990`s, in Norway and Sweden in strong conflicts with the authorities and with several court cases. Norway, Denmark and Finland have a more liberal legal regime for HE with obligated education which means every one can start HE. Sweden and Iceland have a more restricted regime with HE as an exception from obligated schooling, which has to be called for.

Table 1 Comparing HE in The Nordic countries

Country	Number	Law	Supervision	Access to free schools	Test res. (Pisa)
Norway	400	Liberal, obl. education	Yes	Restricted	Middle
Sweden	1-200	Restricted obl. schooling	Yes	Good in urban areas	Middle
Denmark	1-200	Liberal, obl. education	Yes	Good	Middle
Finland	3-400	Liberal, obl. Education.	No	Restricted	High

Conclusions:

1. Liberal law seems to give more visible HE (Norway)
2. Strict law and control seem to give less visible HE, but more underground / hidden HE (Sweden).
3. If loyalty to public schools is good, authorities HE-control is more (Finland).
4. Liberal access to small private schools gives less HE (Denmark and Sweden).

4. Home education and social integration

When school is an important institution for social integration, then out of school movements like home education could be seen as a threat to integration. On the other side If home education is forbidden it would be to ignore parent rights and other fundamental human rights an HE could partly go underground and again become a threat to integration.

Social integration and education has been highlighted after the conclusion in the European HR-court in Strassbourg, in the German “Konrad-case”. One is anxious for development of parallel societies in Europe with ethnic Europeans and immigrant, not at least in Germany. To avoid this The European HR-court in the conclusion chose to give children`s right to education priority before parent rights. It is a national state duty to secure children`s right to education, which include the right to integration through the school community. In the premise for the HR-court`s conclusion there is added that religious influence by parents to their children has to be in a manner so the child understand the consequences. This is radical change from earlier European HR conclusions in home education cases, with less room for parent rights.

The famous culture anthropologist Mary Douglas has a hypothesis about cultural order and purity, which here is of interest. Communities like national states need borders to defend themselves. Purity is inside the border, what is outside is the marginalized, the purity threat, defined by Douglas as “dirt”. Her “dirt-hypothesis” is as follows:

The outsider is not dirt because of its substance, values and practice. It is a threat because it is outside and therefore is dirt.

Strong community pressure then give stricter borders between purity and dirt. Used on home education: Home education is not a threat to school and society because of its values, ideology, curriculum or their pedagogic practice. but because they have placed the education outside school, because of that they become dirt! Such a point unmask that pro school and anti HE arguments to a high degree is based on school as instrument for social control in modern societies and not to secure quality in education.

My conclusion here is:

Modern societies are under pressure and home education is increasing. But there is no cause/effect relation between these two phenomena. The pressure on society is not from home education and home education must be seen as a more specific critic of public schools not of society.

One way to compare national states laws on HE, is to place them along the two axes “*right to home educate*” and “*control with home education*”

Figure 1 HE law conditions in different countries:



In my opinion Norway/Denmark has a good HE-law section. Germany is the worst case, where HE almost is impossible. The German nation is obviously very afraid of HE. Using Mary Douglas dirt hypothesis, Germany as community must be under a tremendous pressure. *You must tell me why!*

I think HE has to be anchored in a national law, which secure both children`s right to education and parents rights. The more complex and detailed the HE-law section is the more conflicts. HE-law section should be simple I think, with the following 4 principles:

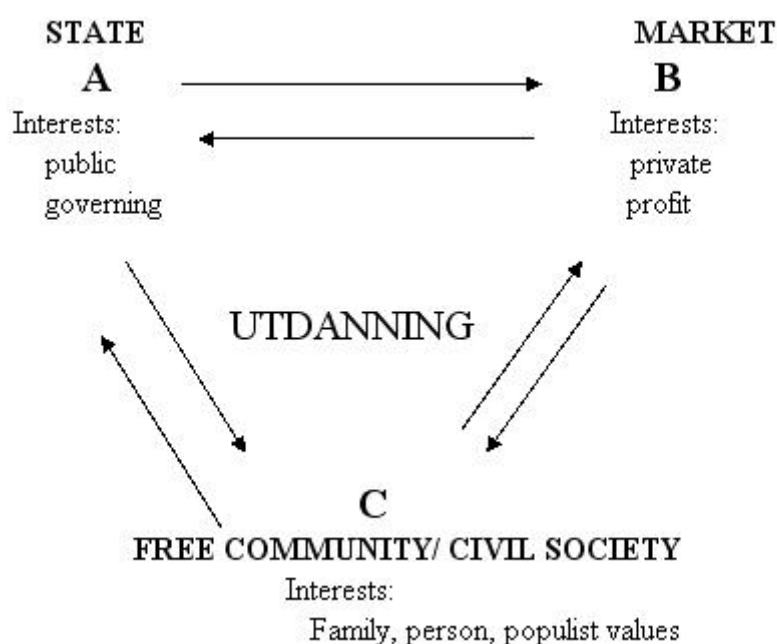
1. HE is a human right for everyone
2. Home educator must give a notification/letter of their HE .to the local school authorities.
3. School authorities supervise HE in a reasonable way, in cooperation with the parents
4. A national council for HE (Conflicts, general discussions) (Tasmania)

5. Conclusion

I find Mary Douglas` purity/dirt argument valid both for authorities and home educators. Both parts seem to define the other as dirt to survive. Then a strict border between “Friendly-us” and “The other as enemy” is produced, often invalid and built on false ground. This strict border counteracts the openness and freedom, on which further development of home education depends. This is a challenge first of all to school authorities but also to home educators.

I will end this speech with some comments to the concept: *Politics of home education* (figure 2):

Figure 2 HE and the triangle of educational politics



Modern educational politics is seen as a battle between (A) state and (B) market, but a destroyed (C) position could be an explanation of modern schooling problems. HE can be seen as a revolt from the destroyed (C) position against both state and market. By HE free communities/civil society role in modern education again is strengthened, as Ivan Illich wanted in the 1970-ies. This is needed not only because of human right arguments, but also to secure enough diversity in knowledge in the rapid changing world we all live in. Then home education should be supported and encouraged not forbidden and counteracted.