

## Historical Tutorial Instruction and Modern Homeschooling

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Beginning a presentation at a colloquium about “home education” by clarifying what “homeschooling” is in the first place, might very well seem like carrying the proverbial coals to Newcastle! However, especially with regard to the topic of this paper, I find it helpful to present a pedagogically motivated definition of homeschooling and to illustrate its distinction from historical tutorial instruction.

*For homeschooling is in no way a continuation of the conventional tutorial instruction that was practiced because of a family’s moral or traditional considerations or because there was no school available in the vicinity. Rather, the decision IN FAVOR OF homeschooling is made in the presence of an available and highly developed public educational system. It is, thus, a conscious decision on part of the parents AGAINST this system – either coming out of a general critical attitude toward school or as a response to the individual needs of a child. In addition, homeschooling is characterized by the fact that parents conduct at least the majority of the instruction themselves rather than delegating it to a third party. Often, however, parents draw on organizations such as distance learning schools and use didactic materials that were tailored to homeschooling by these organizations.*

Education, defined as the introduction of future generations into the customs, traditions and values of a culture, is present in all forms of society; including those that have no notion of education as we understand it. In such cultures, for example in remote primeval societies, children and teenagers receive their education by participating in the lives of the adults around them. In this way, they naturally grow into the existing culture and internalize its customs and values.

If, however, a categorized concept of pedagogical activity, that is to say, a deliberate understanding of education, is shaped within a culture, it always leads to the question of the telos (i.e. the goal) and the organizational form of such activity. Consequently, questions arise of which values this education should encompass and how it is supposed to be organized.

Out of this process emerge two main forms of educational organization – education understood as the integration of upbringing and instruction: on the one hand, schooling of children at home, on the other hand, schooling in institutions, i.e. schools. As far back as the ancient societies, both organizational forms can be identified. Children in wealthy or aristocratic families were usually instructed at home by a private tutor. However, ancient Rome, for example, made an amazingly well developed school system available to the masses. Accordingly, the level of literacy among the population was relatively high.

In the Christian Middle Ages, the only sources that can be found documenting instruction in the home refer to male descendants of aristocratic families. One of the

few written testimonials about this is located in Guibert von Nogent's (ca. 1055-ca. 1125) memoirs, *De Vita Sua, sive Monodiarum libri tres*, in which he gives detailed descriptions of his education. Simultaneously, the tutor's scope of duties had changed. He attended to the training of a young knight until the latter was sent as a page to another court to receive his finishing touches. While in ancient times the tutor introduced his protégés to reading and writing and other such cultural techniques that are valued today, the status-conscious knight looked down on exactly those techniques as 'shaveling arts' that aspiring clergymen learned in convent school. In fact, the septem artes liberales, i.e. the seven liberal arts (grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and musical theory), were consciously juxtaposed to the septem artes probitates: archery, horsemanship, swimming, fencing, hunting, chess and versification. The last, versification, was probably an improvised art – it is well-known that even the educationally zealous Charlemagne (748-814) didn't learn to read and write until later in life and then only with difficulty. Guibert, by the way, who later pursued a clerical career, remembers his tutorial education as terrible.

The decisive impetus for the development of a public school system in Germany was provided by the reformation. The most important figure is, naturally, Martin Luther (1483-1546). While the Catholic Church's claim to be the means of salvation rested on the dispensing of the sacraments, Luther held out "sola fide" (by faith alone) and "sola scriptura" (by scripture alone). Up until that time, Christians could rely on the teaching authority of the Catholic Church in questions regarding the "final things". Now, however, especially the "sola scriptura" required them to be more self-reliant. They stood alone before God, solely sanctified by their faith in Jesus' act of salvation, "sola fide".

With the church no longer mediating between God and the people, "sola scriptura" required believers to read the Bible themselves in order to learn about Christ's life and teachings and to lead a God-pleasing life. Thus, in order to satisfy these demands, protestant Christians had to be taught to read. With this thought in mind, Luther designed the first educational system in the spirit of the reformation, which he outlined in his letter "*To the Councilmen of All Cities in Germany That They Establish and Maintain Christian Schools*". This system not only provided for the teaching of reading and writing to boys – and explicitly also to girls! – but also for instruction in the ancient languages. In this way, each Christian was able to double-check the preacher's Sunday teachings against the original Bible text and make sure he or she was listening to God's unadulterated word.

Thus, it was the reformers and reformed Christians who established the first public schools in Germany in the 16<sup>th</sup> century – a time when the vast majority of the population was illiterate - and laid the foundation for the great tradition of Christian schools.

Yet, at the dawn of those modern times, instruction through tutors or controllers still existed. And with the demise of the chivalric tradition and the discovery of the ancient academic tradition (keyword: Renaissance), the tutor was no longer

responsible for teaching his students archery. Instead, more and more attention was given to reading, writing and similar arts and weighty voices could be heard, clearly preferring tutorial instruction to schooling in institutions. Important theories were established about home education in those modern times by, among others, Michel de Montaigne (1533-1591) in his 'Essais' and, building on that, by John Locke (1632-1704) in his letter *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*. Both authors ascribe great importance to the recognition of a student's individuality and consider real-life learning organized around a familial environment to be superior to institutionalized learning. Even in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Rousseau (1712-1778), in *Emile*, uses a home-based, though tutor-organized, education to exemplify a modern educational concept.

During the 18th century, compulsory schooling was gradually introduced in most German states. This was done mostly for practical considerations, since only the possession of a minimum of basic knowledge by a population was able to guarantee the continuity of increasingly complex federal mechanisms. Correspondingly, the contemporary pedagogy of the 'philanthropists', who's most famous spokesperson was Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724-1790), served to support the state. It was based on the idea that individual students had to be educated in school according to their social status, so that they could best fulfill their assigned roles in maintaining the federal order.

In total opposition to this stood the educational theory of the Prussian school reform movement of the early 19th century, which was inspired by the new humanistic idea of "universal education" (Allgemeine Menschenbildung) whose most important advocate was Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835). In contrast to philanthropic pedagogy, students were no longer supposed to be introduced into the traditions and values of their specific social status but to receive an educational foundation valid for all people. This education also included a system of morals that applied to all human beings. While before, values like "right" or "wrong" had depended on the respective customs and traditions of a social class (e.g. sexual morals, which were treated much more liberally in aristocratic circles than among the bourgeoisie - keyword: mistresses), the new idea of a "universal education" did away with this way of thinking.

Still, serious concerns existed about this school reform. The founder of scientific pedagogy, Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), feared that while the public school system might be able to provide a basic foundation in "universal education", it could still confine students to their original status by offering differentiated, tuition-based educational opportunities later on. In fact, the Prussian school reform movement did provide for a hierarchical structure: over here, there was the universal, basic education, which also prepared students for their vocations; over there, classes were offered to provide more in-depth knowledge and prepare children of deeper-pocketed parents for academic ordinations from a university.

Herbart, in 1810, responded to this hierarchical system with his speech *Erziehung unter öffentlicher Mitwirkung* [Education with the collaboration of the public]. He

suggested a system that combined home-based and institutionalized schooling where the basic instructional work is assigned to self-employed educational artists. These artists would visit families in their home, help raise their children and provide basic instruction. For continuing studies, however, they would send their students to individually selected, publicly offered classes.

This idea never took hold, but despite the introduction of compulsory schooling in the German states, children of aristocratic and wealthy civilian families continued to be taught at home by hired tutors. The Beers, for example, a Berlin banker family, one of whose descendants was the well-known composer Giacomo Meyerbeer (1791-1864), traditionally had their children instructed by first-rate tutors.

During the 19th century, however, the bourgeoisie began to move away from the custom of tutorial instruction, which came to be regarded as feudal, and sent its children to public schools. Formal educational credentials were taking the place of family origin as an instrument in the determination of social opportunities and these formal qualifications were certified institutionally, not privately. This change is reflected in the literature of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: Else Ury's (1877-1943) character, Nesthäkchen Annemarie Braun and Thomas Mann's (1875-1955) impostor, Felix Krull, were no longer taught by tutors but attended public schools.

While tutors were no longer of importance to the bourgeoisie after the middle of the 19th century, they were still employed by the nobility. In addition, they found employment in another, smaller, but not unattractive sphere: among families of artists. For the most part, these families opposed the civic canon of virtues and had few sympathies for civic institutions such as schools. Alma Mahler-Werfel (1879-1964), daughter of the painter Emil Schindler (1842-1892), received such a privately organized education. In her autobiography, she offers interesting insights into her educational process, in which her father not only employed more or less professional tutors but also integrated aspects of homeschooling in the modern sense of the word. With amazing didactic skill, he very successfully managed to instill an interest in literature in his children. At the same time, his wife failed miserably in trying to teach them the multiplication tables: she expected them to memorize the tables in a single day. Summing up her education, Alma Mahler said *"Nothing was ever learned systematically. No date ever stayed in my head, I was only interested in music."*

It is interesting to compare Alma's view of her home education with a statement made by her future husband Gustav Mahler, who had attended a public school. He said: *"Spent my youth in high school – didn't learn a thing."* Thus, it seems that the success of an education depends less on its external organization than on the quality of the teaching.

Tutorial instruction continued to lose popularity and in 1919, the school reform act of the Weimar Republic finally prohibited it completely. Despite having seen the effects of the complete ideological take-over of a generation by public institutions during the National Socialist Period, neither East nor West Germany provided for home-based alternatives to institutionalized schooling after 1949 – even though, at least in West

Germany, they weren't explicitly outlawed. Parents, however, didn't demand them either. In his 1982 essay *A Plea for the Home Tutor*, Hans Magnus Enzensberger (1929 - ) radically criticized the ideology of the entire West German educational system. He formulated a counter-concept demanding a complete deinstitutionalization within the framework of home education. Like Herbart's before, Enzensberger's suggestions did not take root.

It wasn't until the 1990s that a broad movement formed in Germany with the goal of legalizing home education, formulating concepts and offering networking for interested parents. This movement calls for "real" homeschooling according to my initial definition. Homeschooling is now no longer founded on family tradition. Rather it is based either on the parents' fundamental critical attitude toward school, which leads them to reject the available school system as a whole, or it has its roots in the individual needs of a specific child who cannot, for psychological or physical reasons, be integrated into the public school system.

In Germany, the legal situation at this time is such that the school laws of most states provide for the possibility of being granted an exception from compulsory schooling. However, it is extremely difficult to be granted permission for homeschooling as initially defined here. Still, it is not impossible.

We can distinguish four groups of homeschoolers in Germany:

1. **German children and teenagers living abroad who don't have access to a German speaking school** and for whom the requirement of compulsory school attendance has been waived for this reason. This group mostly includes children of diplomats and missionaries. The choice to homeschool was not determined by the parents' critical attitude toward school but by external circumstances.
2. **Children and Teenagers who for various reasons - mostly psychological or physical illnesses – cannot cope with institutionalized schooling** and are therefore granted permission to be homeschooled. Parents of children in this group often have to fight hard to be granted this permission. Here, too, the parents do not necessarily have a critical attitude toward school in general. Rather, they act on the specific circumstances of an individual child while the child's siblings often attend a regular school.
3. **Famous teenagers who can not or no longer be traditionally schooled** because their presence in a school would interfere with regular school activities. This fairly new group is, of course, very small. However, the media follows these cases with special attention. To this group belong, for example, the school-aged band members of *Tokio Hotel* or singer Chistina Klein, a.k.a. LaFee. We have no knowledge about the parents' attitudes toward school in either case.
4. **Children and teenagers being educated at home because of their parents' critical attitude toward school or ideological considerations.** In some cases, school officials turn a blind eye on these families; in others, parents have to make great personal sacrifices in their battle with school

officials.

From a pedagogical point of view, the second group offers the best starting point for an objective discussion about the possible legalization of homeschooling in Germany. This group's choice to homeschool is made solely in the best interest of the child, while the fourth group's decision is motivated by the parents' desire (the first and third groups already have official permission to homeschool and can therefore be ignored here.) Parental wishes are, of course, not to be neglected – and a legal discussion can be led on those grounds - however, we cannot automatically equate those wishes with the best interest of the child. Homeschooling cannot be a license for parents to pass possibly dubious world views on to their children without any influence and correction by the state. Home educators do not have to teach the same content as schools, nor do they have to use the same methods, but they have to adhere to the same regulatory standard: that of scientific and moral validity. We cannot allow homeschooling to be used as an instrument for continuing private customs and traditions that contradict this standard.

Educational science views homeschooling as one possible form of organization for the education of future generations - one that is equal to others. It analyzes and assesses homeschooling as an educational idea and with concern for the child's best interest, not from legal, political or ideological points of view.

The pedagogical and social opportunities of homeschooling lie in the option to precisely tailor the educational program to the pupil. This is not possible in institutionalized instruction. While this does not mean that schools have lost their validity, they do seem to have their limitations – also in view of the current social and political developments. This is emphasized by the cries for help of many hundreds or even thousands of parents whose children are often mentally overwhelmed but intellectually unchallenged in schools, or are placed in special education schools due to different social skills and learning styles despite their intelligence. For those children, homeschooling would offer the opportunity to successfully follow their individual educational path in a protected environment, free of fear. In this context, we should also remember the approximately 250,000-500,000 burnt-out teenagers who have, at least temporarily, interrupted their school career of their own initiative – despite the present legal situation. For very diverse reasons, more and more children and teenagers drop out of the school system, end up without an official diploma, get shoved from one advancement program to the next – all of which need to be paid for out of the social security fund – and still cannot find perspective. With this reality, we need to start discussing homeschooling in a serious manner - if for no other reason than to take the strain off the struggling public schools. Educational science is asking the right question here: Which method of schooling is the best in a particular case or for a specific child?

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