

A Kind of Treason...?

by Roland Meighan

You can get tired of people voicing their ill-considered views on home-based education with no apparent knowledge of the research in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and elsewhere. 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 democratically elected presidents 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 Head teacher 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 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 the 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 themselves showing signs of being damaged by their mis-education at school, 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.'